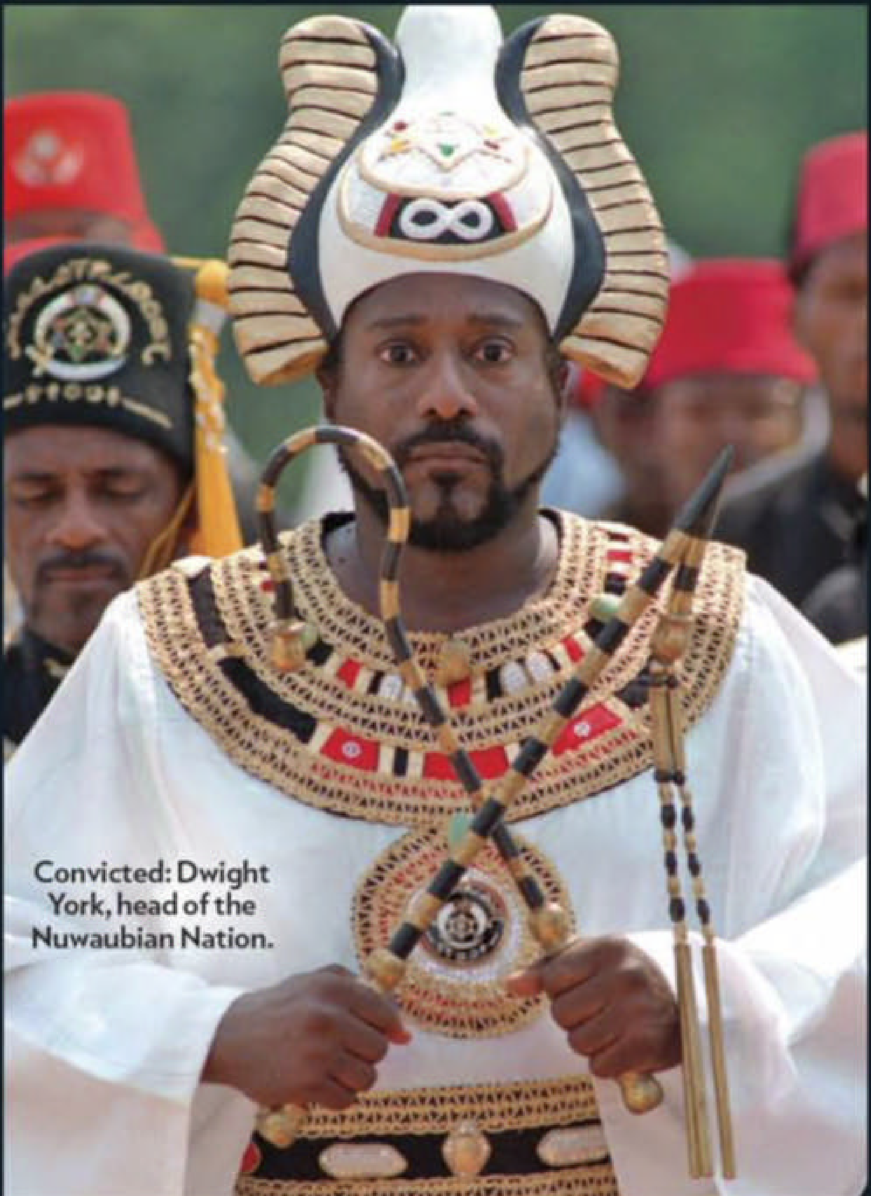
David Koresh's Branch Davidian compound near Waco, Texas.

INSIDE THE SINISTER WORLD OF CRIMINAL CULTS

CHARISMATIC LEADERS WHO USE MIND CONTROL • SURVIVORS: WOMEN WHO ESCAPED CHARLES MANSON'S MURDEROUS FAMILY, JIM JONES'S MASS-SUICIDE CULT AND SEX SLAVERY • PLUS: PREVIEW THE NEW TV SEASON OF *PEOPLE MAGAZINE INVESTIGATES*


Convicted: Dwight York, head of the Nuwaubian Nation.

Amy Eddy and Pebbles Rodriguez today. As girls they were forced to marry preacher Tony Alamo.

SPECIAL EDITION

People

HOW THEY ESCAPED

THE JONESTOWN SUICIDES

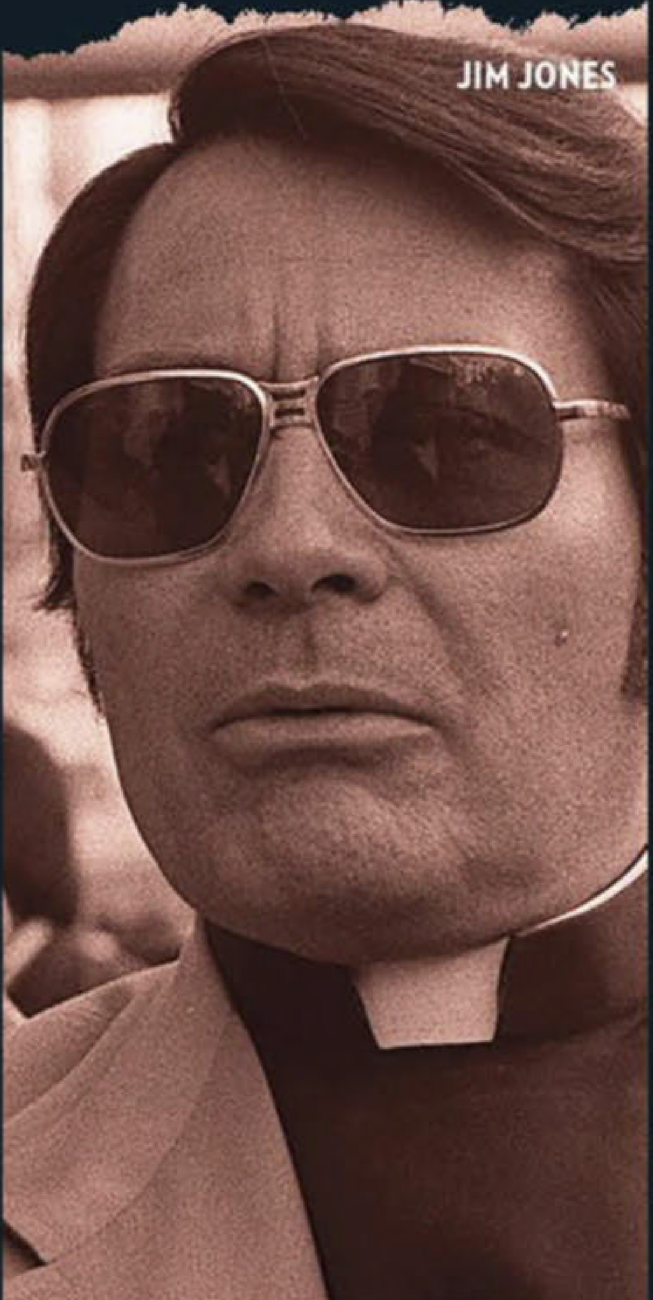
A CHILD-SEX CULT

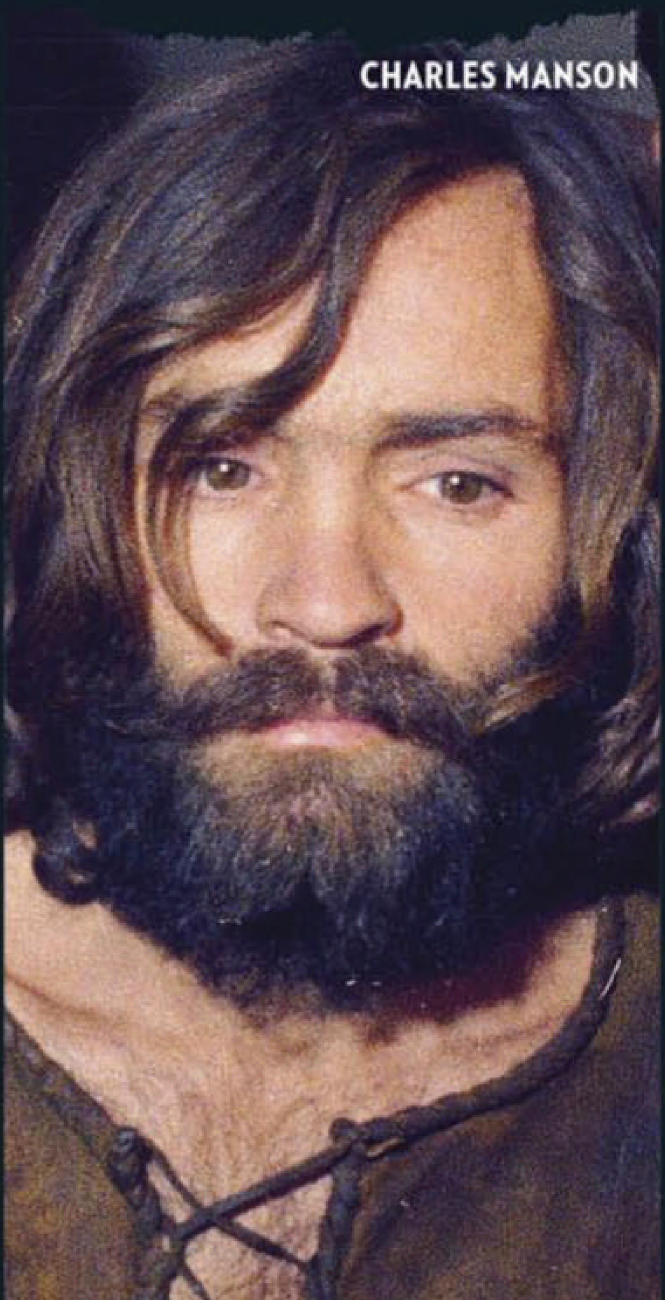
TRUE CRIME STORIES

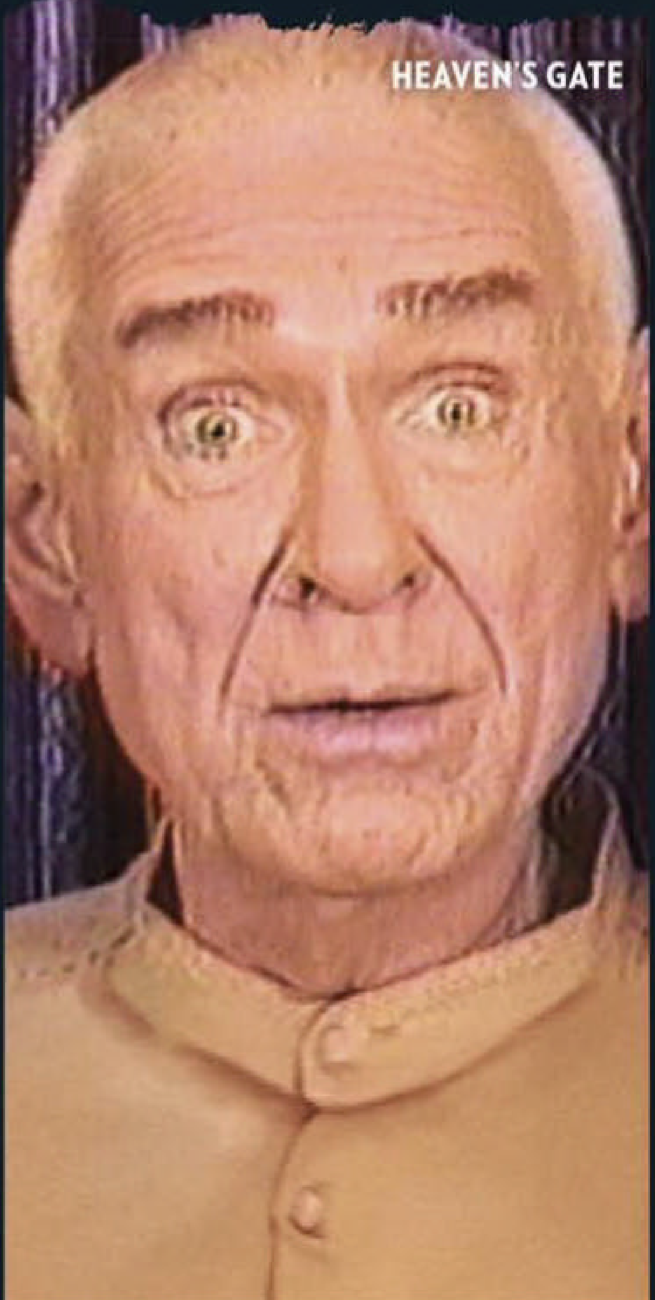
CULTS

Shocking tales of people lured into traps of abuse, manipulation and death

Plus Nxivm: How the supposed self-help group drew in celebrities


JIM JONES


CHARLES MANSON


HEAVEN'S GATE

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TRUE CRIME STORIES

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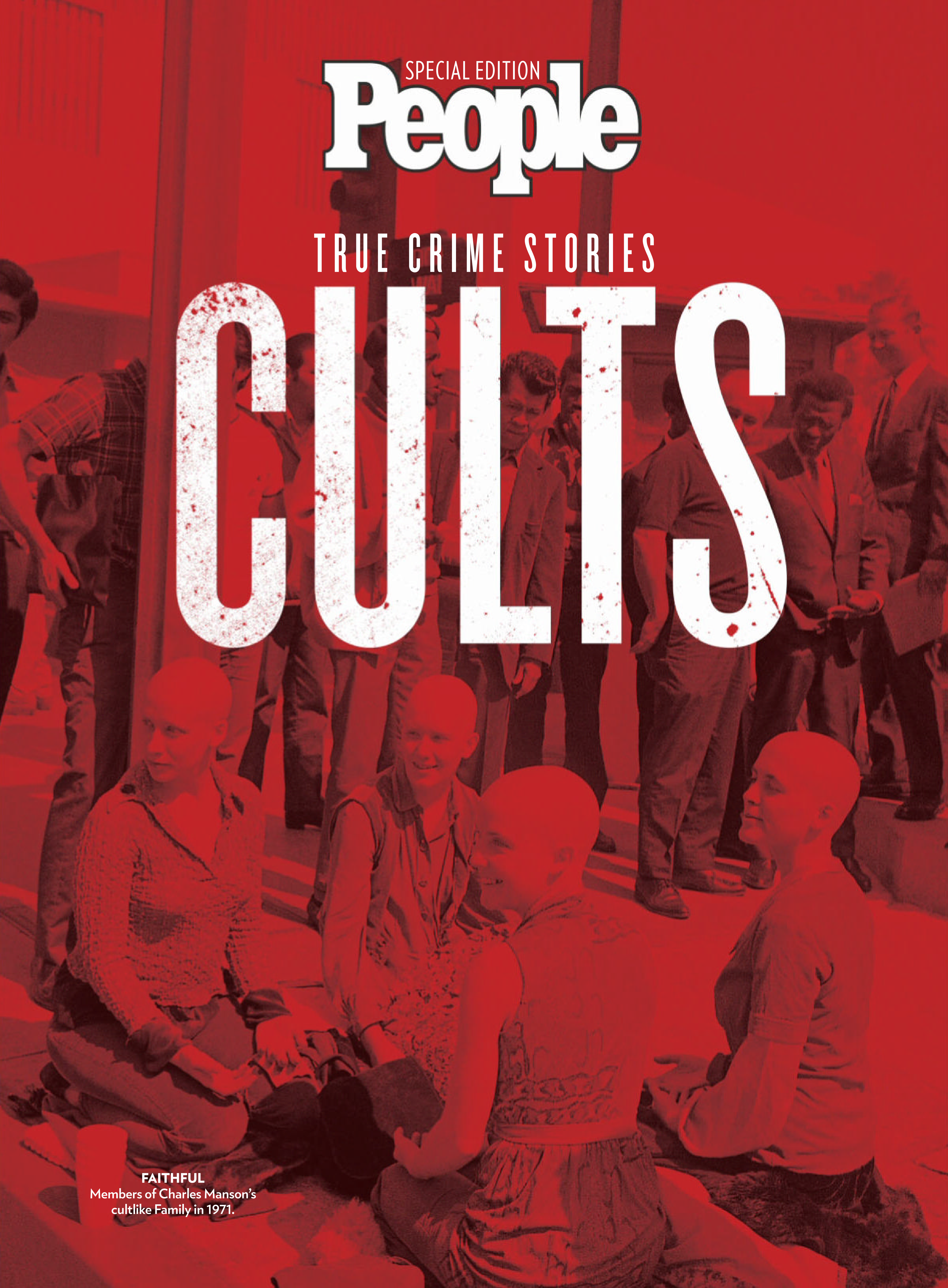

FAITHFUL
Members of Charles Manson's cultlike Family in 1971.

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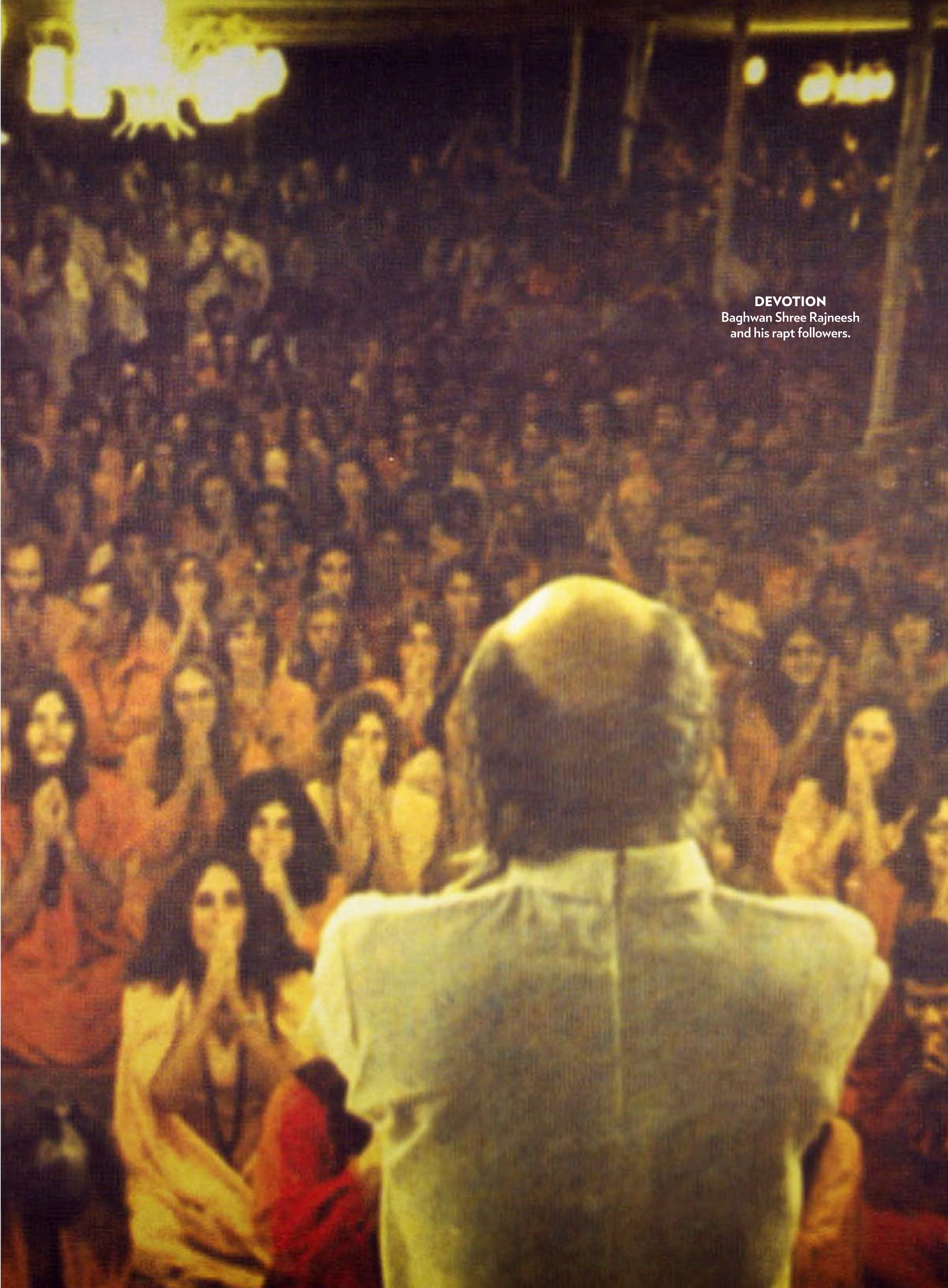

DEVOTION
Baghwan Shree Rajneesh and his rapt followers.

真理党五つの政策4
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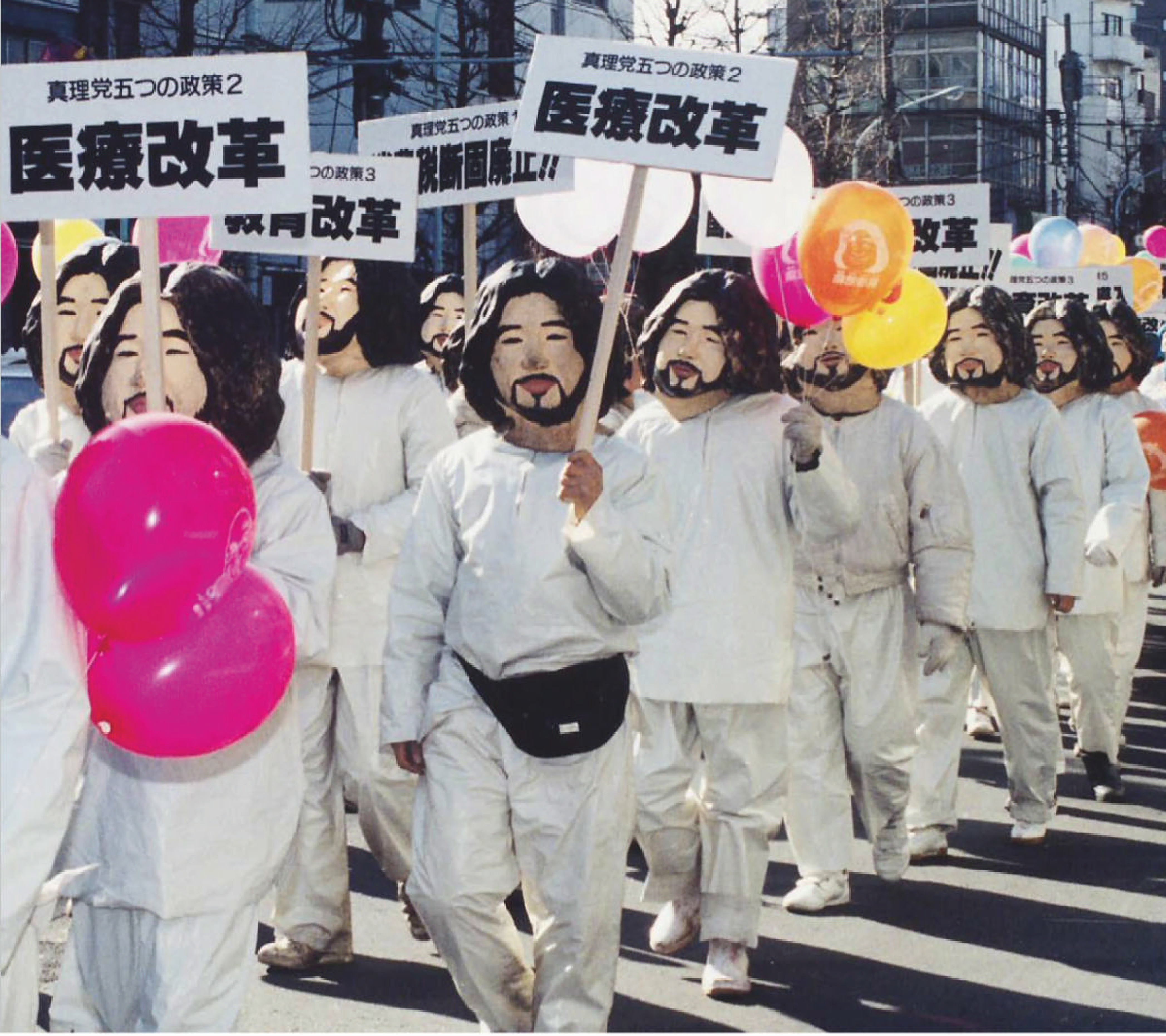
COULD IT HAPPEN TO YOU?

Secretive. Coercive.
And often magnetic.
How cult leaders manipulate
their followers' minds

CULTS OUT OF THE PAST are having a moment in the culture today. Netflix's recent hit docuseries *Wild Wild Country* told of the violent efforts of Indian spiritual teacher Baghwan Shree Rajneesh and his band of followers to take over a sleepy Oregon town in the 1980s. Paramount Network premiered *Waco,* a fictionalized account of the Branch Davidian sect, whose leader, David Koresh, and 74 devotees met a fiery end after a 51-day standoff with federal agents in 1993. The creator of *Breaking Bad* is writing a script for HBO about the Peoples Temple cult leader, Jim Jones, who in Guyana in 1978 led more than 900 disciples in what is believed to be the largest mass suicide in modern history. (It was this tragedy that gave us the phrase "drank the Kool-Aid," to describe blind commitment to a cause.) Meanwhile, director Quentin Tarantino is at work on a film centering on Charles Manson and his Family, whose savage killing spree in 1969 has spawned multiple books and movies.

What accounts for this fascination with insular groups of zealots gathered around a charismatic master, often to the detriment of themselves and others? The perversely enduring appeal of the cult story may come down to this question: Could it happen to me? Would I fall under the influence of a malevolent leader? Social psychologist Richard Ofshe, a professor emeritus at the


真理党五つの政策2
医療改革
真理党五つの政策2
医療改革

TOTAL FAITH
Members of the doomsday cult Aum Shinrikyo paraded on the Tokyo streets wearing masks of their leader, Shoko Asahara, in 1990.

University of California at Berkeley who has studied cults, cautions against answering that question with a reflexive no. “First of all, nobody sets out to join a cult,” Ofshe says. “People join organizations that appear to be beneficial to them, that they think are offering them something of value.”

Once in the cocoon, recruits form bonds with other members and, manipulated by leaders, soon lose sight of the world beyond. “The key is the isolation, being cut off, hearing no alternative to whatever the leader says is the truth,” says expert Rick Alan Ross, author of *Cults Inside Out.* “That’s what accounts for the submission.”

And yet people do escape from cults—at least physically. Then it can take months of deprogramming to gain emotional release. “It’s a process of teaching people what exactly they got involved in,” says Ofshe, “and how they were manipulated.”

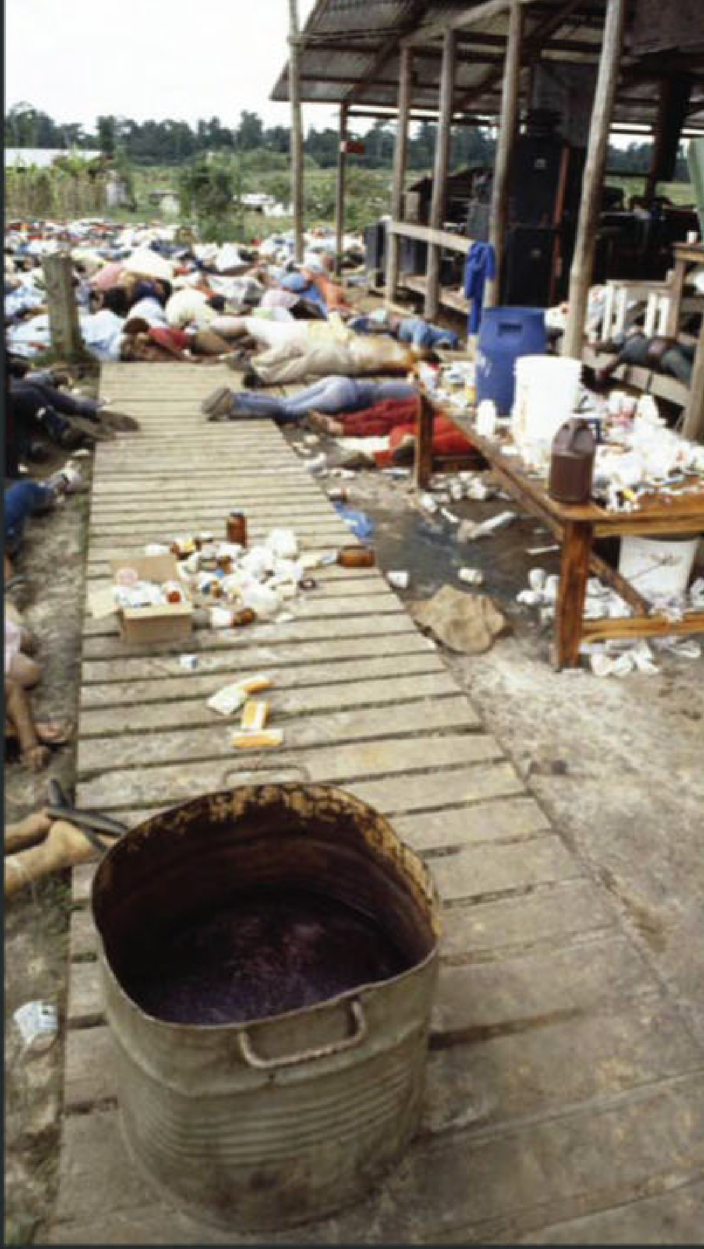
In this special issue of *People* examining these controversial groups and their leaders, there are remarkable stories of survival, told by those who escaped Jonestown, the Manson Family and more recently Nxivm, a purported self-help group whose founder is now charged with sex trafficking. (He has pleaded not guilty.) The stories can be upsetting, but they also reveal the survivors’ bravery and strength, to both exit a cult—and then shine a light on a previously secret world.

SURVIVORS

ESCAPE FROM HELL

LUCKY FEW
Brenda Parks (left, and her sister Tracy, with an unidentified man and, right, Brenda's boyfriend Chris O'Neal) were among only dozens of members of Jim Jones's Peoples Temple to get out alive.

SURVIVORS
"We were so scared, we just kept running," recalls Tracy Parks (left, with her father, Jerry, days after the mass suicide, far right, in '78) of fleeing from cult leader Jim Jones (right).



THE PEOPLES TEMPLE

LAST DAY OF JONESTOWN

12-year-old Tracy Parks fled for her life in the apocalyptic final hours of Jim Jones's cult in Guyana; those left behind—some 900 adults and children—became part of the largest mass suicide in modern history

“SIX O’CLOCK!” THAT WAS THE shout that roused her from her dormitory bed each morning. Tracy Parks, a freckled 12-year-old, leaped up, dressed as fast as she could and ran to breakfast. In Jonestown, layabouts were punished—and punishments could be severe. Breakfast was a bowl of rice and milk with insects floating in it. Next there was school until noon, and then, for the rest of the day, she would work in the bean, rice or sugarcane fields until supper. Then she would attend Rev. Jim Jones’s evening sermon until 2 in the morning, knowing that if she dozed off, she risked a beating. Such was the life of a child in the Peoples Temple.

Tracy had been a member of the church all her life. She was only 6 weeks old when her father, Jerry Parks, moved to California to follow Jim Jones. Jerry had never encountered a preacher like him. Jones seemed to be able to heal the sick with the power of prayer. He believed deeply in social justice: He and his wife, Marceline, were the first white family in the history of Indiana to adopt a black child.

As a little girl Tracy loved the Peoples Temple, a place full of song and love. But as she grew older, she began to chafe at Jones’s strictness. In particular she was disturbed when, from his pulpit, Jones accused a young couple of having premarital sex and threatened to force them to fornicate in front of the entire congregation. Tracy says she looked at the adults in the room and thought, “You can’t think this is all right.”

Had she asked them, they probably would have answered, “If Father does it, then it’s got to be all right.” Peoples Temple members lived and ate together in

A CULT’S ROAD TO INFAMY: TIMELINE

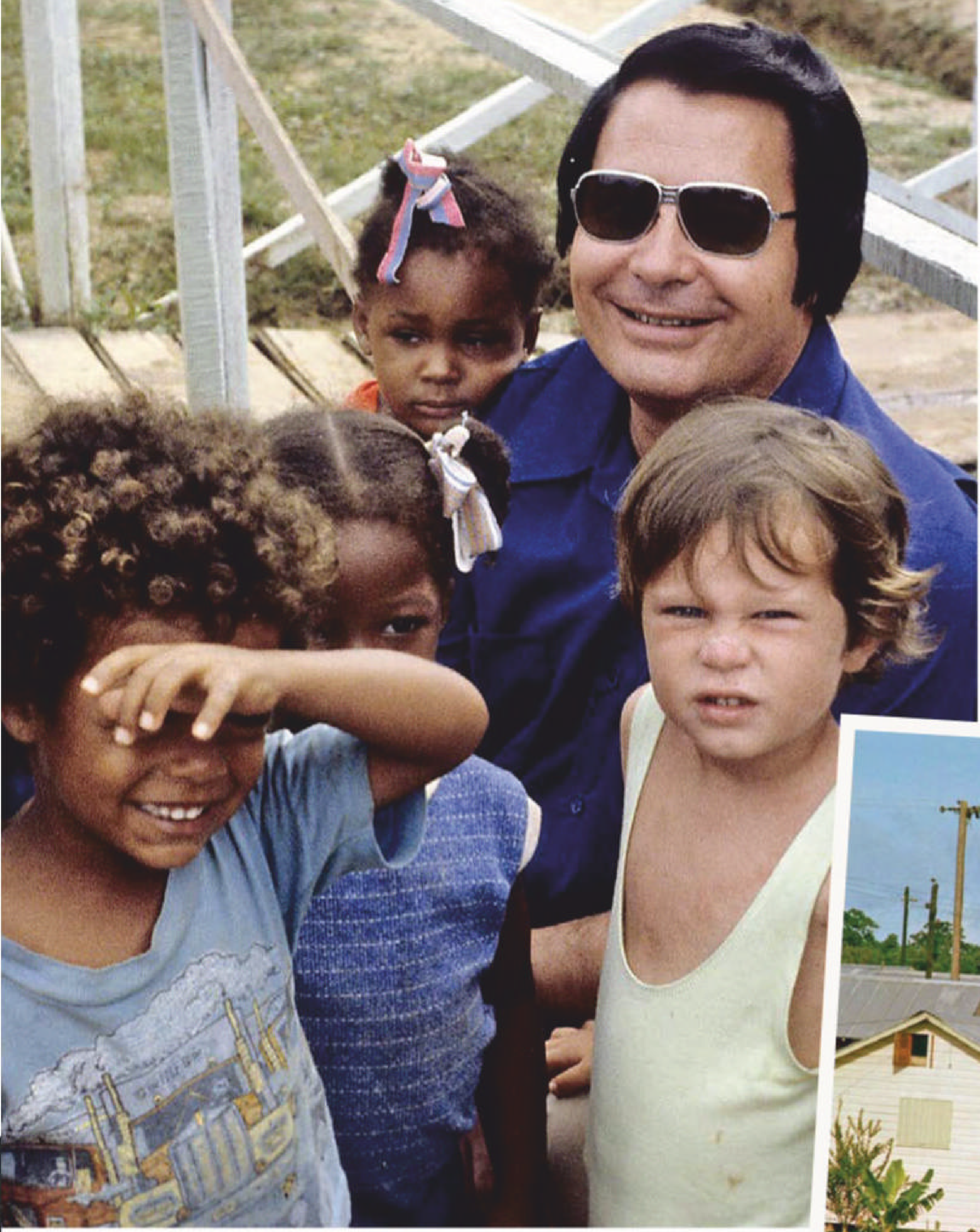
1955, RIGHTEOUS TALK
Jim Jones (below in Los Angeles ca. 1974) forms the Peoples Temple Christian Church in Indianapolis to preach his gospel of racial equality.

1965
GROWING APPEAL
Jones moves his congregation to the San Francisco area, where he acquires homes for juvenile delinquents, a fleet of buses and fresh recruits. By 1972 he claims to have as many as 20,000 members. Among them: Jerry and Patricia Parks and their children Brenda, Dale and Tracy.

JULY 1976
WHO’S THE DAD?
Member Grace Stoen defects, leaving behind her son John, 4 (above). Because her husband had signed an affidavit declaring Jones the boy’s biological father, the cult leader refuses to release the child to her. She files for custody.

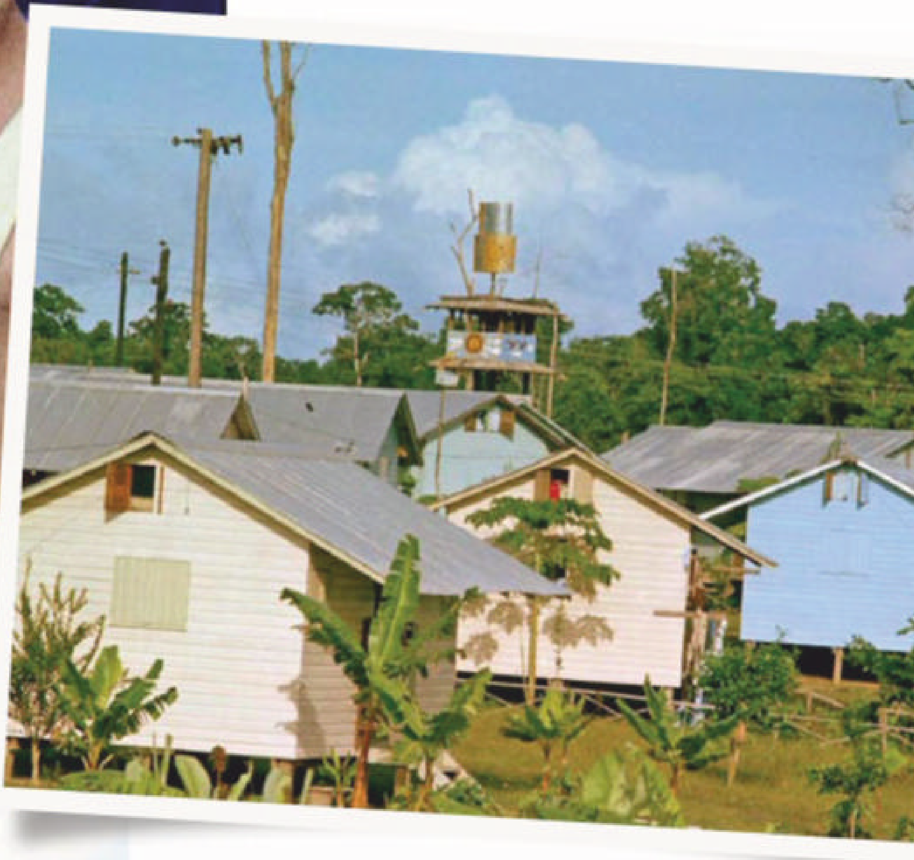
AUG. 1, 1977
ROAD TO GUYANA
After California magazine *New West* publishes a story accusing Jones of financial impropriety and ordering physical assaults, he moves his church and followers to a remote compound on 3,800 acres of land in Guyana, taking 5-year-old John Stoen along with him.

NOV. 18, 1977
DAY IN COURT
A judge in California awards custody of John to Grace Stoen, with visitation rights given to her husband, Tim. The San Francisco court further rules that Jim Jones’s rights as John’s guardian are void and orders that “all actions necessary” be taken to return the boy from Guyana to his parents.



FATHER FIGURE
Jones (with children in Jonestown ca. 1978) won followers as a champion of racial justice: He and his wife, Marceline, were the first white couple in the history of Indiana to adopt an African-American child.

COMMUNAL LIVING
Jones's followers lived in communal houses (below), often separated from family members, and worked in farm fields planted with bananas and grapevines.

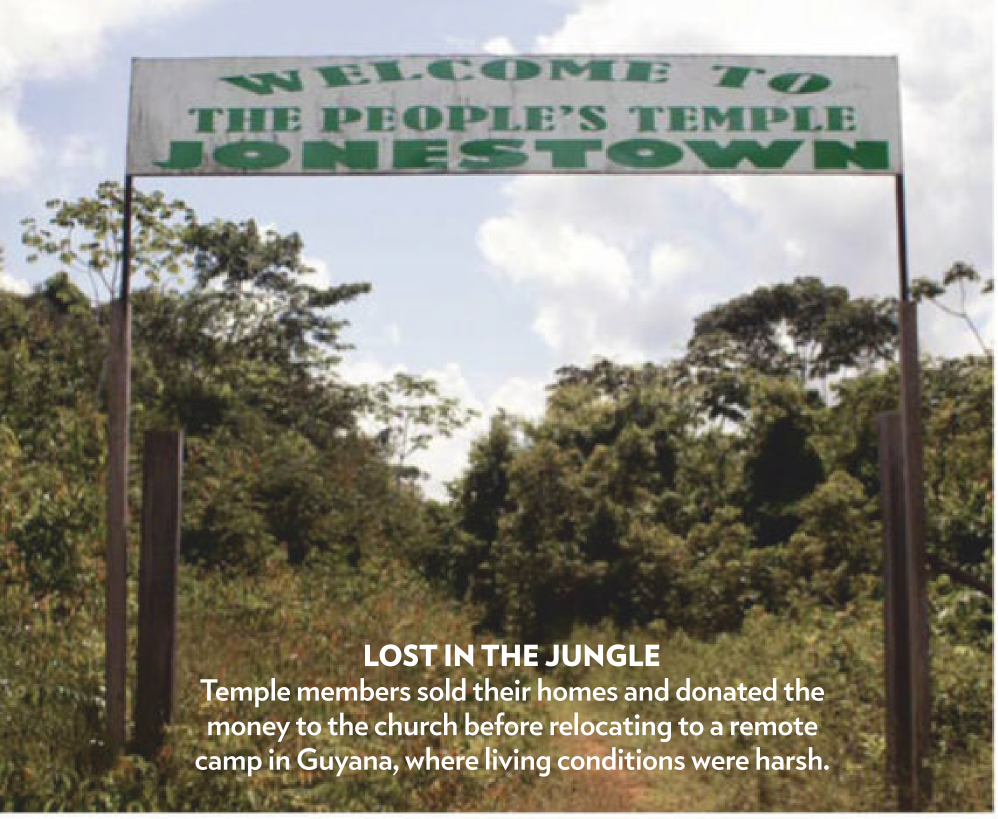


NOV. 17, 1978
CONGRESSMAN'S VISIT
At the urging of the Stoens and other former members, U.S. Rep. Leo Ryan (below) travels to Jonestown to meet with Jones.

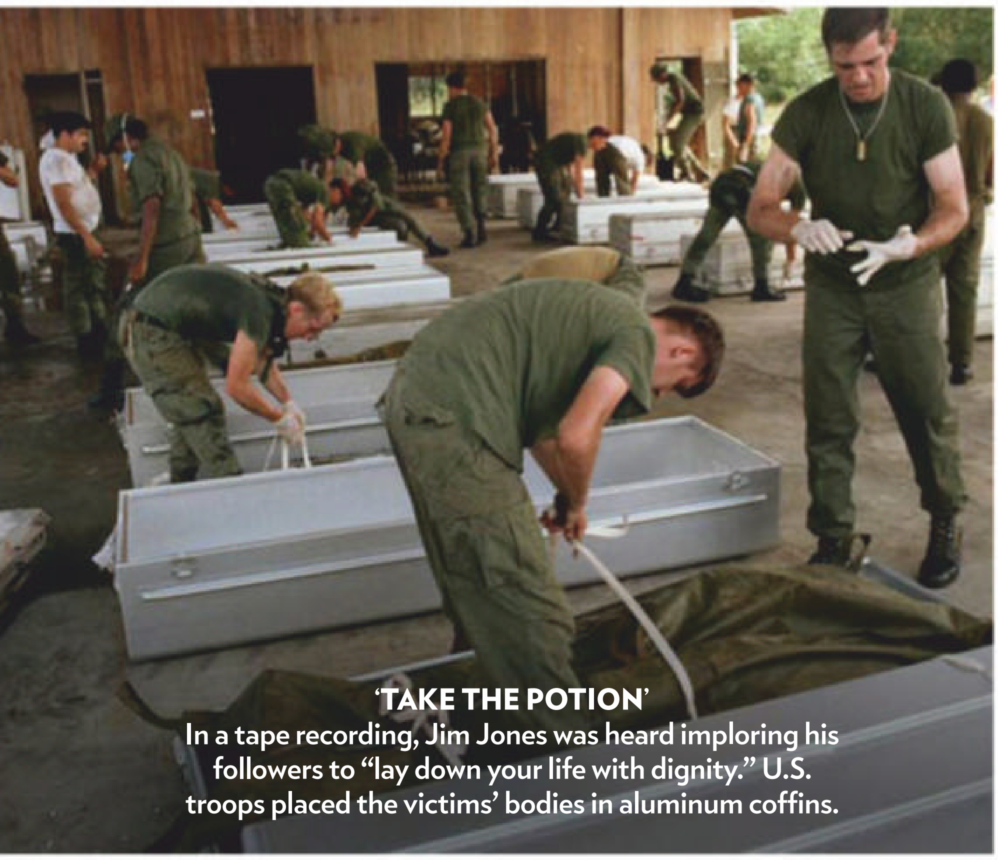
Guyana Airways

NOV. 18, 1978, RUNWAY MASSACRE
Ryan leaves the camp with 15 church defectors, including Tracy and her family. Jones supporters attack the group on the airstrip, fatally shooting Ryan, three journalists and Tracy's mother, Patricia (inset); Tracy's father, Jerry, tends to the wounded as Tracy and her sister flee into the jungle.

NOV. 18, 1978, MASS MURDER
Jones gathers his followers and urges them to commit "revolutionary suicide." Armed members ensure they drink cyanide-laced punch. Nine hundred nine people die, including John (whose paternity was never resolved).



LOST IN THE JUNGLE
Temple members sold their homes and donated the money to the church before relocating to a remote camp in Guyana, where living conditions were harsh.



'TAKE THE POTION'
In a tape recording, Jim Jones was heard imploring his followers to "lay down your life with dignity." U.S. troops placed the victims' bodies in aluminum coffins.

communal homes. Many donated their entire salaries to the church and then did volunteer work for it late into the night. As time passed, "Dad" became more authoritarian and his followers more like children. "Without me, life has no meaning," Jones would tell them. "I'm the best thing you'll ever have."

But the California media began investigating the Peoples Temple. Former church members told tales of exploitation and abuse, and the bad publicity infuriated Jones. He'd already purchased 27,000 acres of land in Guyana, which he named Jonestown. In 1977 he ordered his followers to join him there or "go to hell." Nearly 1,000 obeyed—including Jerry, his mother, Edith, wife Patty and their three children.

Tracy hated Guyana the moment they landed. It was night when they arrived, and "the air was so thick and hot, you could hardly breathe." The Parkses quickly grew uneasy. "There were guys with guns," recalls Tracy. Their passports and other belongings were taken away. They soon learned that the children would be housed separately from their parents. Jerry realized that he'd "made the biggest mistake of my life."

The next day he made an even bigger mistake, letting it be known that he wanted to leave. Jones was furious when he addressed the community that evening. "I hear you don't like it here," he roared at Jerry; a security guard beat him up.

For more than seven hellish months, the Parks family tried their best to fit in. Then, in November 1978, a lifeline appeared. Rep. Leo Ryan, a California Democrat, had become concerned about a custody battle involving Jones and one of his constituents (see timeline) and personally flew to Guyana to investigate.

Jerry Parks seized his chance. "We want to go home," he told Ryan. You'll be back in the United States today, Ryan assured him. But as Ryan and his entourage escorted the Parks family and nine other defectors to a nearby airstrip and prepared to leave, a hail of bullets rained down on them. Patty Parks was the first of five people killed, including Ryan. In a panic, Jerry ordered Tracy and her sister Brenda to run into the jungle surrounding the airstrip.

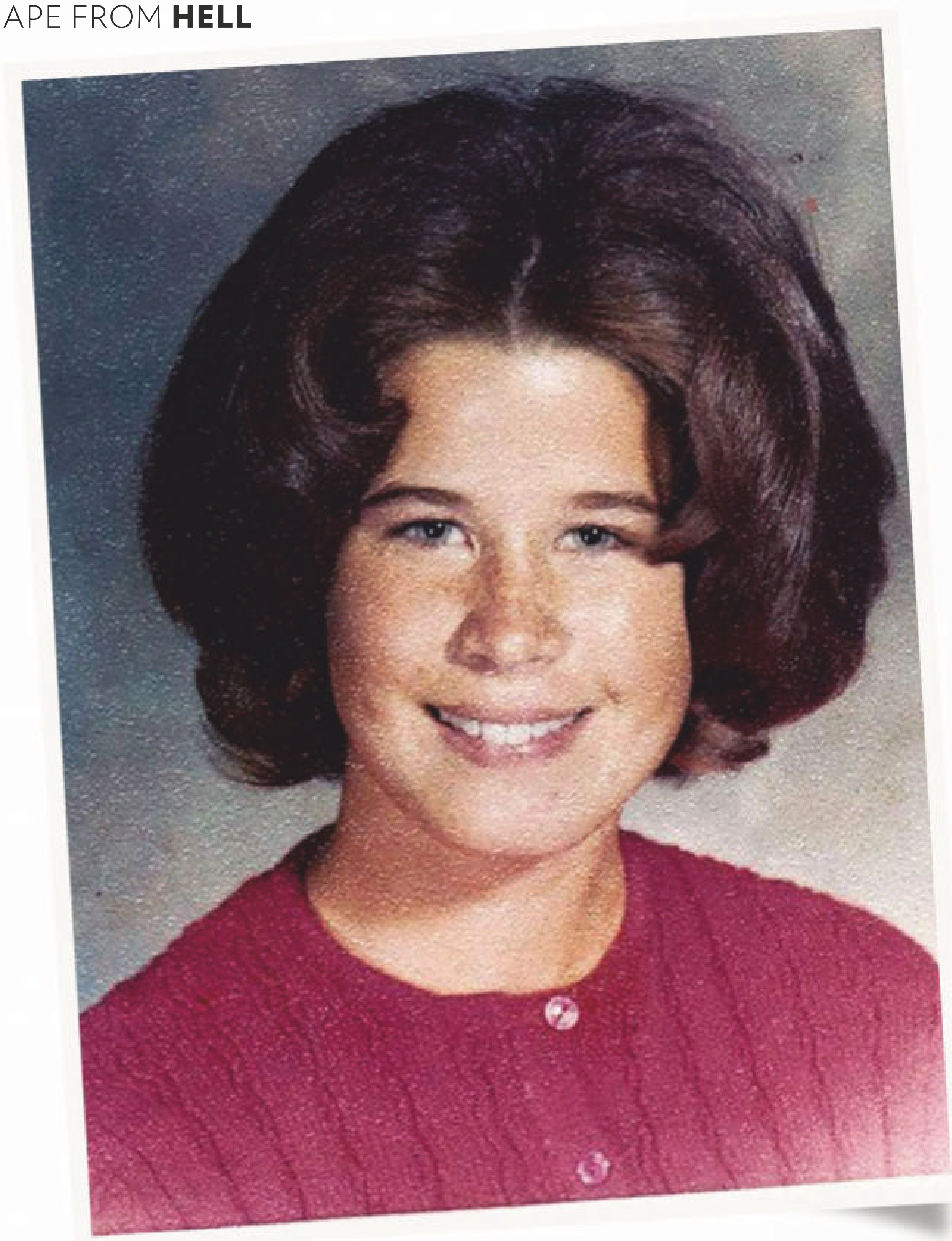
Back in Jonestown, Jim Jones convened a community-wide meeting. He knew that the murder of Ryan meant the end of his reign. It was time for him, and all who loved him, to leave the world. "Let's die in peace," he said as staff began distributing cyanide-laced punch, first to the children, then to the adults. "Death is not a fearful thing; it's living that's cursed." In a matter of hours, more than 900 people lay dead.

For a time it looked as if Tracy and Brenda would also die. They were lost in the jungle, ill with fever and without food or water. Finally, on their third day on the run, they were found by a search party. The surviving Parkses, including Dale, returned home and got on with their lives as best they could. It was difficult without their beloved Patty and with all their money gone. Tracy, who drank heavily in her 20s to "keep me from feeling," went on to raise two children of her own and ran a daycare business for more than 20 years. When she thinks of Jonestown, she often remembers a sign that Jones displayed above a throne on which he used to perch, a quote from philosopher George Santayana: "Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it." That, says Tracy Parks, "is the only time that Jim Jones ever told the truth."

Live
Laugh
Love

> THERE HAVE BEEN TIMES I'VE WANTED TO GIVE UP, BUT I PUSH THROUGH FOR MY MOTHER. I WANT HER TO BE PROUD OF ME. I DON'T WANT ANYONE FEELING SORRY FOR ME EVER"
> **—JONESTOWN SURVIVOR TRACY PARKS**

NEVER FORGET
Every year on the day of the massacre, Tracy (in Ukiah, Calif., with her father) lights candles in memory of her mother, who died in Jonestown. "I'm a fighter," she says. But "time doesn't heal anything."

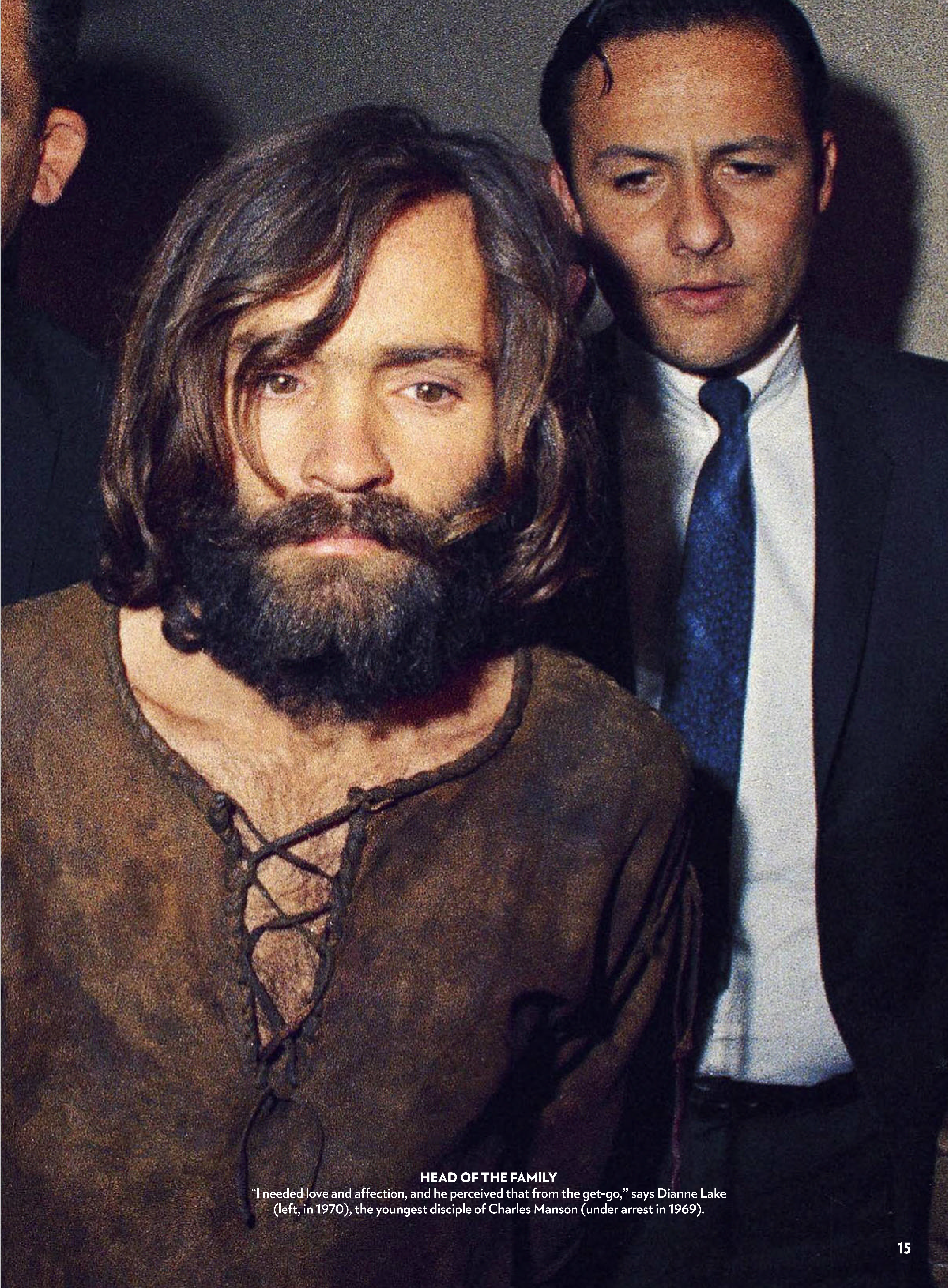


THE MANSON FAMILY

SEDUCED BY A MONSTER

17-year-old Dianne Lake worshiped Charles Manson as a lover and father figure. Then she helped to convict him of the ritual killings that riveted the world

Adapted from the book *Member of the Family: My Story of Charles Manson, Life Inside His Cult, and the Darkness That Ended the Sixties* by Dianne Lake and Deborah Herman. Copyright © 2017 by Dianne Lake. Reprinted by permission of William Morrow, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers.



HEAD OF THE FAMILY
"I needed love and affection, and he perceived that from the get-go," says Dianne Lake (left, in 1970), the youngest disciple of Charles Manson (under arrest in 1969).

LOST INNOCENCE
Lake in 1960 in Minneapolis, shortly before her father traded the family's comfortable home for a rickety trailer and set out on the road. Her parents eventually abandoned her.

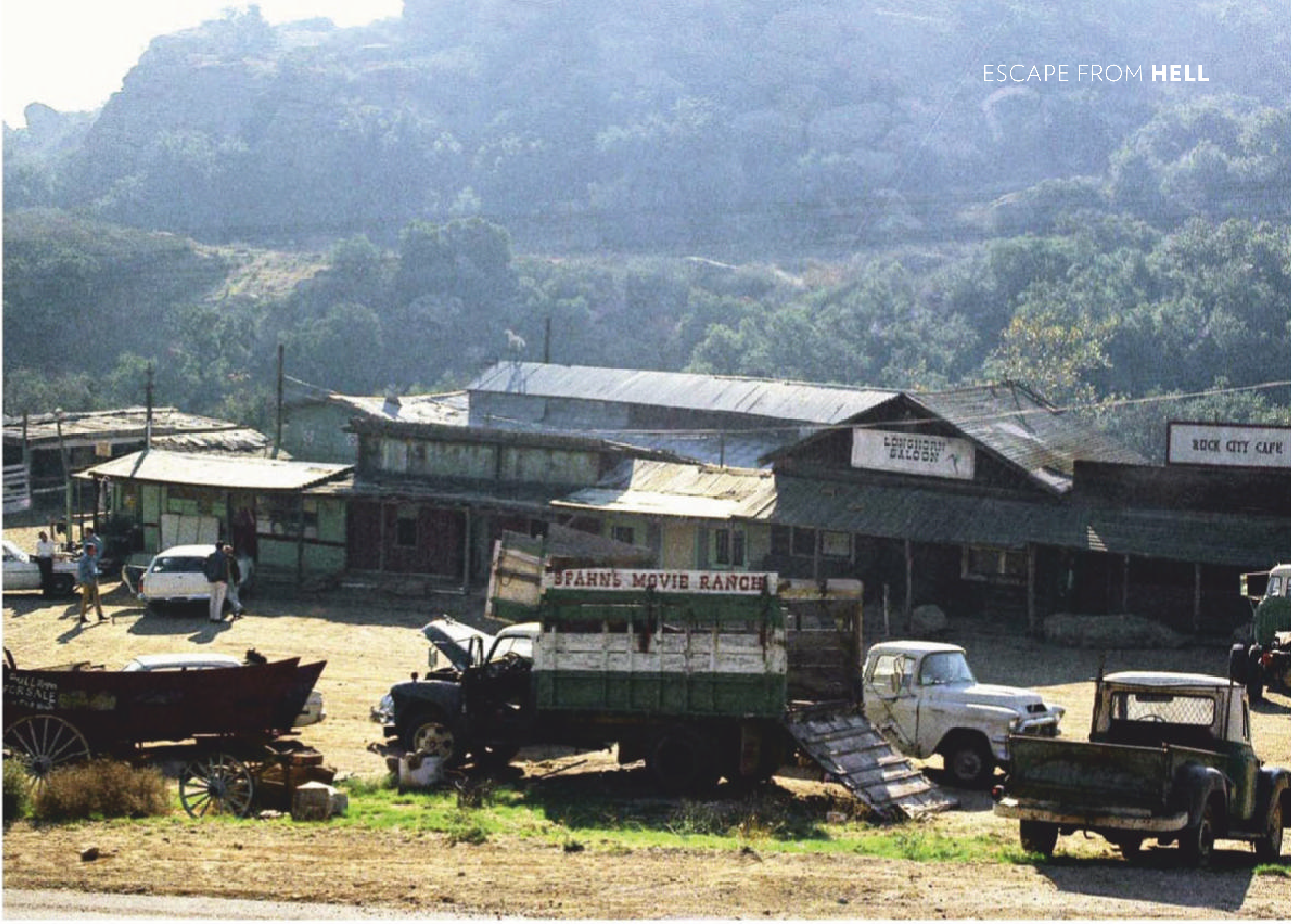
IT WAS A HOT AUGUST DAY in Death Valley, and 16-year-old Dianne Lake listened in horror as her friends giddily described the hell they unleashed in the hills above Hollywood. "The woman was pregnant and was begging for her life," Susan Atkins said of 26-year-old actress Sharon Tate, butchered along with four others in her home on Cielo Drive in Los Angeles in the early hours of Aug. 9, 1969. "I thought about saving the baby while I was stabbing her but decided against it."

Like "teenage girls discussing makeup and the boys they liked at school," Atkins, Patricia Krenwinkel and Leslie Van Houten bragged about their roles in the Tate murders and those two nights later of wealthy grocer Leno LaBianca, 44, and his wife, Rosemary, 38, Lake—who was not involved in the killings and was hearing about them for the first time—writes in her 2017 memoir *Member of the Family.* The late Los Angeles prosecutor and author Vincent Bugliosi, whose 1974 bestseller *Helter Skelter* kicked off a media onslaught that has fed the public's Manson fixation ever since, called the killings "the most bizarre murders in the recorded annals of American crime."

They were ordered by Manson as part of his mad plot to ignite an apocalyptic race war that he called Helter Skelter, after the Beatles song. His family of followers would survive the conflagration, he reasoned, with him crowned as savior of the world. "I think he truly believed in his delusion," Lake, the youngest of Manson's followers and now a 65-year-old mother of three, told *People* last year, shortly before Manson died at 83 while serving nine consecutive life terms in prison.

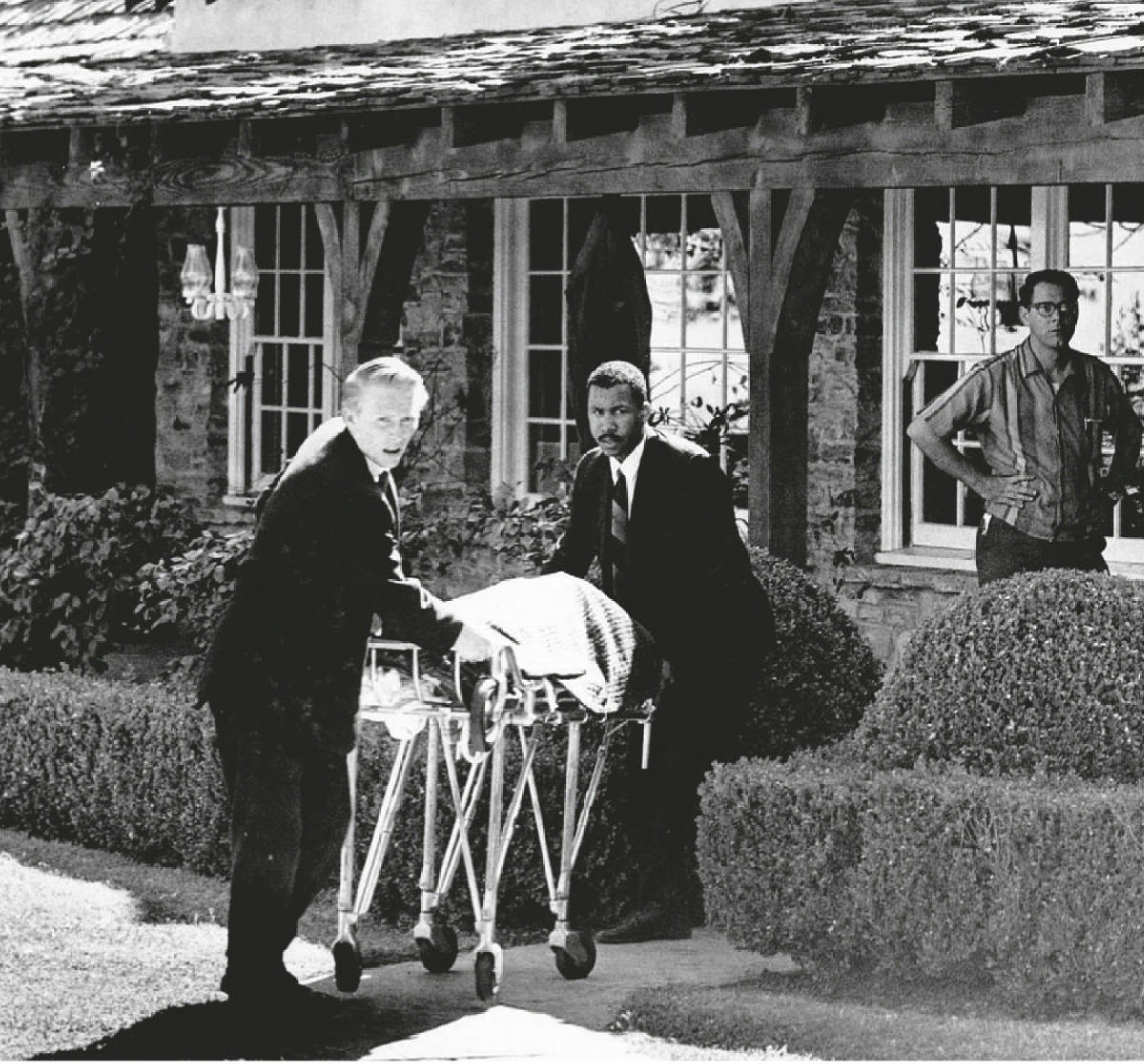
The rampage was almost surreal in its savagery. Manson's followers hacked their victims to death, then smeared the walls with lyrics from Beatles songs written in blood. In the process, the Manson Family traumatized the country and changed the way people lived—now fearfully, behind fences and locked gates—and sounded the death knell of the Age of Aquarius '60s dream of harmony and understanding.

Enduring to this day is the mystery of how Manson, a lifelong criminal and pimp from Appalachia, who had spent more than half his life incarcerated when he landed at age 32 in


LONGHORN SALOON
ROCK CITY CAFE
SPAHN'S MOVIE RANCH

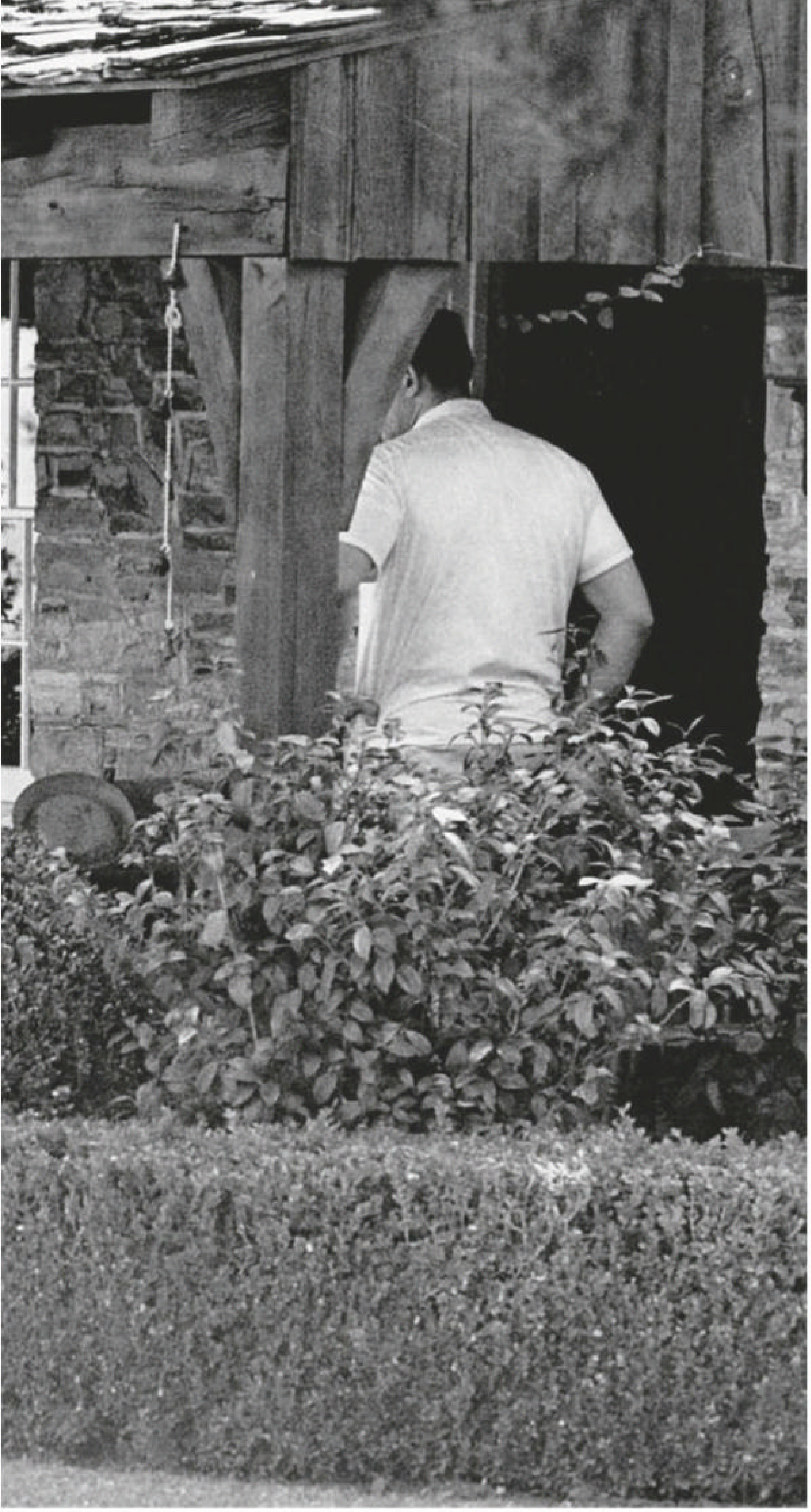
MOUNTAIN HIDEAWAY
Spahn's Movie Ranch owner George Spahn was in his late 70s, blind and "cowboy smart," Lake wrote. Manson talked him into letting the Family live on the old film set (above) by giving him his pick of the female followers.

TEENAGE DREAM
Lake (left, in 1965) wrote that she was "just a normal [seventh grade] girl, interested in boys, hair, *Seventeen* and, most important, the Beatles." Two years later she would meet the charismatic Manson.



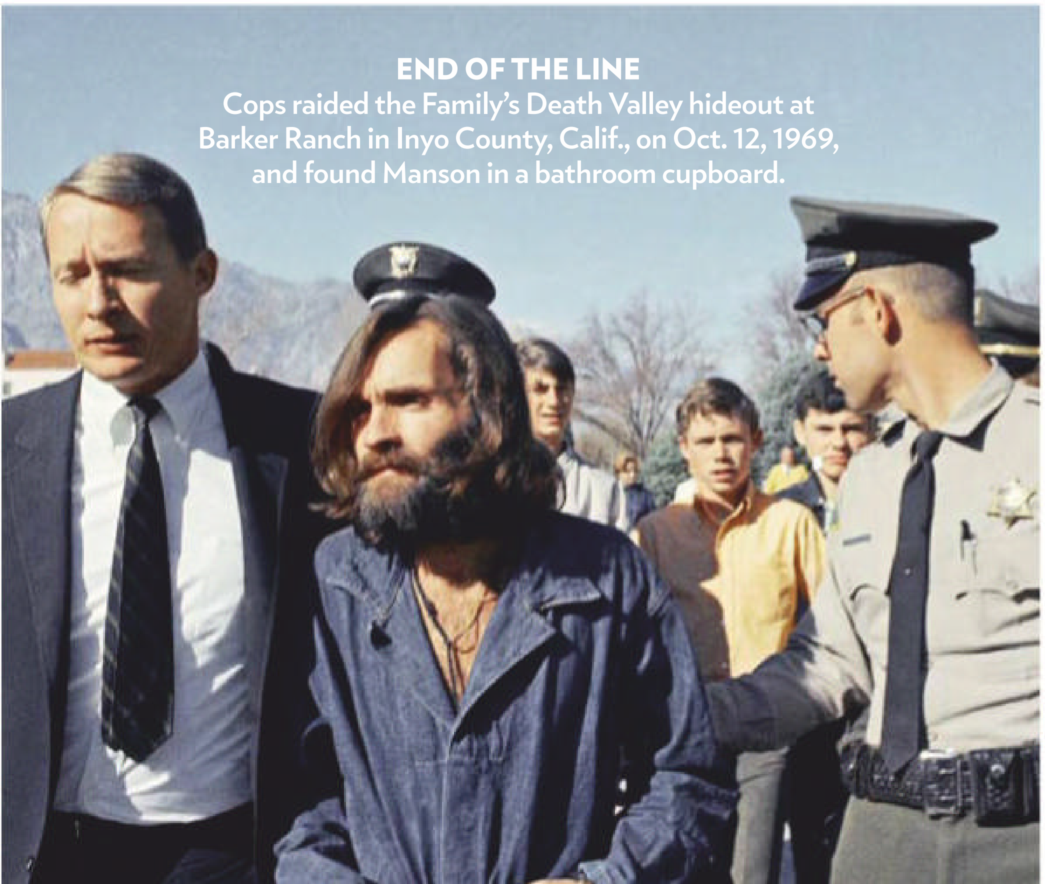
DEATH TRAP
"Kill whatever pigs are in that house," Manson told his followers when he directed them to the house on Cielo Drive, where the body of Sharon Tate was removed by investigators (above).

HIGH LIFE
Communal living at Spahn's Ranch (left) meant that Manson's girls slept with whomever he told them to, including one another as well as outsiders.

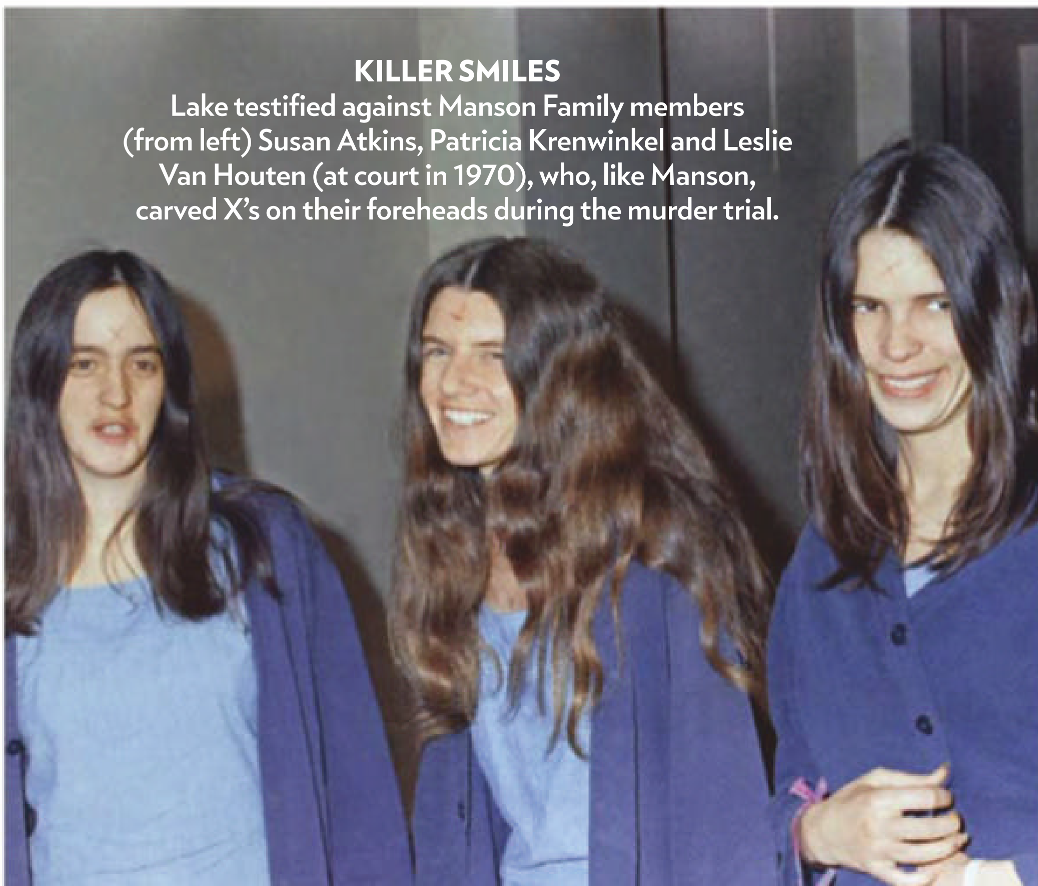


the hippie mecca of San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury in 1967, turned a group of educated flower children from middle-class, if shattered, homes into zombie-like murderers.

Among those who fell under his spell but did not succumb to his lethal madness was Lake. Her childhood was a cracked fright-house mirror of the era. She was a baby boomer from what looked like an Ozzie and Harriet family, until Mom and Dad tuned in to the counter-culture lifestyle while their barely teenage daughter experimented with pot and LSD and had sex with whomever she liked. "Emancipated" by a nonlegal note from her parents, who had already taken a ride with "Black Bus Charlie," as Manson was known for the foreboding hue of his psychedelic school bus, Dianne was just 14 and longing for family when she found one from hell at a party in Topanga, Calif., in 1967. "So this is our Dianne," Manson said, recognizing her from a photo her parents had given to him when he visited the California commune where they were living. "[He] pulled me to his chest in a hug so close I could feel his heartbeat," Lake wrote. "Charlie held me at arm's length, looked at me and said, 'Oh, you're beautiful. I want to talk to you. I've been looking for you.' " He led her to his bus, and they made what was for her life-changing love. "This small [5′3″] man oozed self-confidence and sex appeal. I felt a deep connection."



END OF THE LINE
Cops raided the Family's Death Valley hideout at Barker Ranch in Inyo County, Calif., on Oct. 12, 1969, and found Manson in a bathroom cupboard.



KILLER SMILES
Lake testified against Manson Family members (from left) Susan Atkins, Patricia Krenwinkel and Leslie Van Houten (at court in 1970), who, like Manson, carved X's on their foreheads during the murder trial.

MEMBER OF THE FAMILY
DIANNE LAKE

“I FORGAVE MY PARENTS. I SURVIVED AND PREVAILED DURING THIS DARK TIME. I’M NOT ASHAMED OF [MY TEENAGE SELF]. I LOVE HER”
—DIANNE LAKE

CLEAN SLATE
Lake (in 2017), who kept her history as one of “Charlie’s girls” a secret for years, decided to speak out as the 50th anniversary of the crimes approached. “I wanted to correct the story of me,” she says.

For all his mesmerizing charm, Manson also controlled his female followers with a physical force learned in prison, according to Lake. "An old pimp gave him [the] secrets to keeping women loyal and malleable," she wrote. Manson used "fear and intimidation" with gusto, doling out beatings while at the same time "becoming the greatest lover in the girl's life, satisfying her like no one else can."

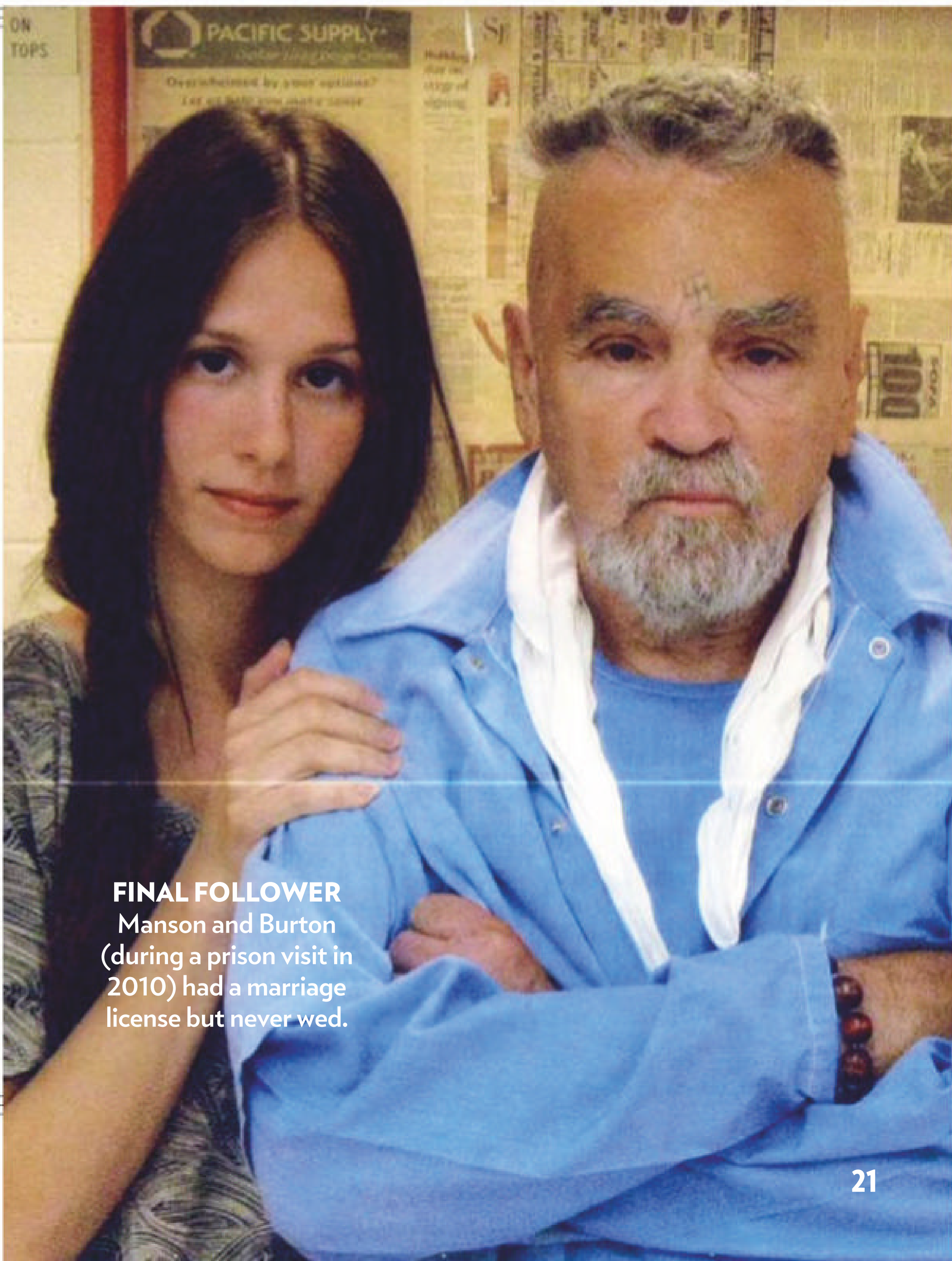
For two years Lake lived communally with Manson and his Family on Spahn's Movie Ranch, an old cowboy-film-location set 20 miles north of Los Angeles that once served as the town seen in *The Lone Ranger* and *Bonanza.* Life there was an endless round of LSD and group sex sessions accompanied by Manson's increasingly unhinged sermonizing, Lake recounts. Drug deals gone wrong and other criminal schemes drew heat from a biker gang as well as cops. And when Manson's dreams of becoming a famous rock star were crushed—Terry Melcher, a powerful music producer who refused to offer him a record deal, had previously lived at Sharon Tate's house on Cielo—Manson Family life, Lake told *People,* turned to "chaos."

Oblivious to Manson's plans, Lake stayed behind at Spahn's and watched over the Family's children as the others set out to murder. Later, sickened and fearing for her life since learning of the killings that day in Death Valley, Lake was separated from the Family following Manson's arrest because she was underage and was eventually taken in by the family of one of the state troopers who had arrested her. She underwent months of treatment for psychosis in a mental hospital before she took the stand to testify against him in 1970. Then 17, she had courageously given hours of damning testimony when a Manson defense lawyer asked if she still loved him. Lake looked at Manson, "and for a moment his eyes seemed to soften," she wrote. "I guess so," she replied. "Charlie shouted out to me: 'You loved everybody. Don't put it all on Mr. Manson.' The entire courtroom, including the judge, burst out in laughter." Stunned, Lake looked at Manson and "saw through him," she wrote. "[He] was deflecting responsibility from himself by humiliating me.... He showed himself for what he really was... a fake, a fraud, a pimp and a con artist. And now I was truly free of him."

MANSON BEHIND BARS

HE SPENT HIS LAST 49 YEARS IN A CELL, CLAIMING INNOCENCE TO THE END

"I can kill you," he assured the last reporter to interview him. Striving to maintain his image as an avatar of evil in prison, Manson—who died at 83 in 2017—was cited for more than 100 infractions including assaults and hoarding his old elixir, LSD, at the series of facilities where he was held. Though renounced by ex-disciples, he received fan mail from around the world and had an (unconsummated) romance with a follower 52 years his junior, Afton Burton, who showed her ardor by carving an X in her forehead. As for the murders, Manson told *Rolling Stone* they were "a psychotic episode. You want to blame me for that?"



FINAL FOLLOWER Manson and Burton (during a prison visit in 2010) had a marriage license but never wed.

SECRET WIVES Best friends Pebbles Rodriguez (left) and Amy Eddy (at Alamo's house in Arkansas) were both forced to wed the cult leader as minors. "He told me, 'This is between me, you and God,' " says Eddy.

ALAMO CHRISTIAN FOUNDATION

THE PREACHER'S CHILD BRIDES

Evangelist Tony Alamo's dream of a world of prayer and prosperity turned into a nightmare when he preyed on the teenagers of his flock

THE CHILD'S NAME WAS PEBBLES—a petite, dark-eyed girl with flowing hair. She was 12 but looked younger, dressed up in her Sunday best, nervously waiting to meet with her pastor. Devoutly Christian, she held her pastor in the highest esteem, and the scene would have been a wholesome one—except that the meeting between Pebbles Rodriguez and Tony Alamo was about to take place in a federal prison.

It was 1998, and Alamo, spiritual leader of the Alamo Christian Foundation, was serving time for tax evasion. It wasn't his first stay behind bars, and it wouldn't be his last, but nothing Alamo did seemed to dim the devotion of his hundreds of followers. He was over 60, with gray whiskers and receding hair, but Rodriguez had been raised to regard him as a supernatural prophet of God.

She trembled as she sat down with him. "I had a dream," she stammered, "that I . . . married you." It seemed to Rodriguez at that moment that Alamo already knew—that he had always known her thoughts. "That is exactly what's going to happen," he assured her in

TURNING POINT
Followers said Tony Alamo never recovered from the 1982 death of his wife, Susan (at their California church in 1971). In time his rule turned tyrannical.

his prophet's voice. "You're going to be a wife."

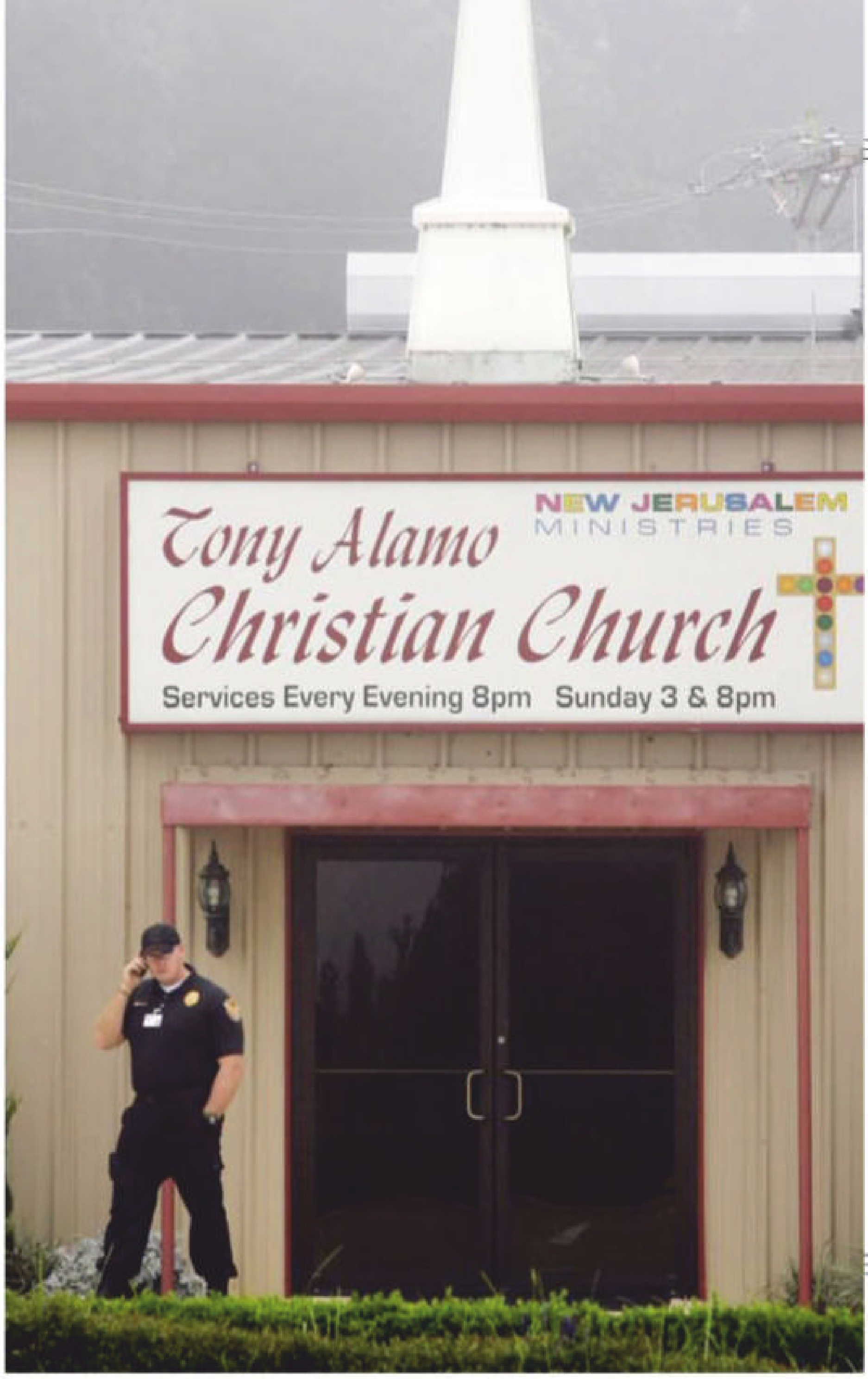
Pebbles had just one terrified thought: "I'm 12."

Of course, the truth was, Tony Alamo was no prophet. He was a depraved, charismatic tyrant with a flammable temper who raped his young followers and forced them to recite marriage "vows." It was whispered that Tony had never fully recovered from the death of his wife, Susan. The couple had started the Tony and Susan Alamo Christian Foundation in California not long after they wed in 1966, recruiting mostly runaways, drug addicts and other lost souls on the streets of Hollywood. Members submitted to long days of unpaid labor, fervent prayer and absolute obedience to the Alamos' authority. In return they received life's necessities and, more important, assurances that God would reward them in the hereafter. At the same time, they were warned that anyone who dared depart from the sect would roast in hell forever.

When Susan Alamo died of breast cancer in 1982, Tony had her body placed in a coffin and deposited in the living room of his mansion in western Arkansas, where the cult had moved in the mid-1970s. With complete conviction, he announced to his flock that in three days Susan's body would rise from its casket and

THE DICTATOR'S SOFTER SIDE
Alamo (top, in 1971) lured followers with promises of food, love and moral guidance. When members Gail Risha, a Jew, and Edward, of Lebanese descent, gave birth in 1975, he dubbed their son Benjamin (above) the cult's "Peace Baby."

SEX OFFENDER
Alamo (with Rodriguez on a trip to Las Vegas) was convicted on federal counts of transporting children across state lines for sex and was serving a 175-year sentence at the time of his death in 2017.


Tony Alamo
Christian Church
NEW JERUSALEM
MINISTRIES
Services Every Evening 8pm Sunday 3 & 8pm

WHO KNEW?
CULT DENIM

At the height of his power, cult leader Tony Alamo was a millionaire entrepreneur as well as a sadistic sex offender. His enterprises included the Tony Alamo fashion line—denim jackets gaudily decorated with paint and rhinestones. Nicki Minaj, Miley Cyrus and Mr. T are among the celebrities who have been seen wearing them on the church's website. None probably suspected that the jackets were made by the followers of an apocalyptic preacher, many of them children, working all day for no wages while Alamo lived in a luxurious 13,000-sq.-ft. mansion. No longer in production, Tony Alamo jackets still sell secondhand on eBay for as much as $900. Surprisingly, a church that bears the disgraced prophet's name (left) still attracts worshipers today in Southern California.

Miley Cyrus

Mr. T

live again. All they had to do was pray to the Lord to make it happen. So they prayed like mad, around the clock. When three days passed and Susan remained dead, Tony became enraged. "You didn't pray enough! You didn't give up enough!" he roared. After six months a stench rose from the coffin, and it had to be moved to a sarcophagus.

This, then, was the man who, after his release from jail, assembled a roomful of young female followers, including Rodriguez, whom he called his "wives." For polygamy, he said, is "condoned by God," and "the legal age for marriage is at puberty." From his bedroom he began calling the girls to him, one by one. Eventually he called Rodriguez.

She had long dreamed of marriage. Indeed, she'd spent hours talking with "my Christian friends about how beautiful it was going to be." But this was a horrific parody of a wedding night. She stared at the wallpaper, a red floral pattern, and counted the petals. "It was the worst nightmare of my life," she says today. "When he was done raping me, he said, 'Now get up and clean this bed.' "

The daily lives of Tony's "wives" were almost as bad. "We were beaten and mentally abused," says Amy Eddy, a close friend of Rodriguez's who became Alamo's "wife" at 14. "I've seen girls with their jaws broken, with missing teeth." Eddy says she was beaten by Tony, dragged by her hair and starved. But, like all the wives, Eddy, whose parents had joined the church before she was born, felt she had no choice but to stay because Alamo was the prophet of God, and "there's no way there's ever gonna be room in heaven for us if we leave."

Eddy, then 22, finally escaped the cult with help from her father. In 2009 she was among several of Tony's child brides to testify against him in federal court. For his crimes Alamo was sentenced to 175 years in jail. "One day," the judge told him, "you will face a higher and a greater judge than me. May he have mercy on your soul."

It took tremendous courage for Eddy and the others to get up in court and testify against Alamo. And it was their example that gave Rodriguez the strength to flee in 2010. Today, at 32, she is a mother of two, living in the Southwest; Eddy, 34, is applying to colleges to study creative writing. Alamo himself died in prison on May 2, 2017. And yet, incredibly, the cult persists. Eddy's mother is among those still under Alamo's hypnotic spell. "She still thinks he's a prophet," says Eddy, fighting back tears. "If I could talk to my mom, I would tell her: I love you. And you need to be free."

SISTER SURVIVORS
Eddy (left) and Rodriguez (earlier this year) still suffer from post-traumatic stress after their decade-long ordeals under Alamo's control. "We have a strong connection," says Rodriguez.

NUWAUBIAN NATION

SUBJECTED TO SEX SLAVERY

Promised freedom from society's racism, Malachi York's followers and their children often became victims of rape

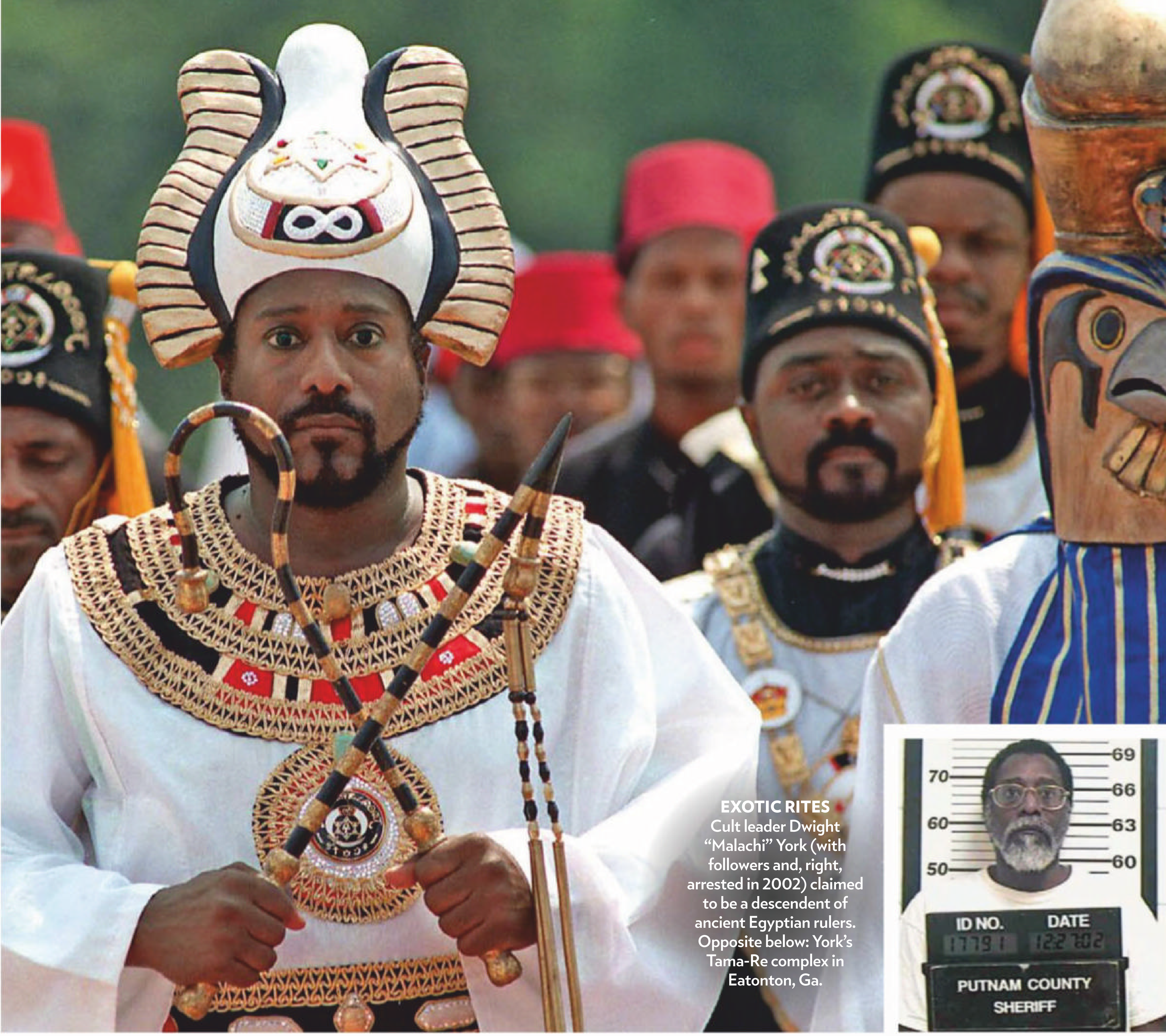
INNER RESOLVE
After being raped by the Nuwaubian's leader, ex-member Niki Lopez (left) worked with the FBI to bring down the cult (whose members marched during a festival in 1998).

A LIFE APART
"I was cut off from society from age 11 to 25," says Lopez (wearing white robes during her time in York's cult).

ONE DAY, WHEN RUBY GARNETT was a 14-year-old girl sitting alone in a New York City beauty shop, a man walked in, looking as if he'd come from another world. He was dressed in white robes and smelled of sweet, exotic oils. To Ruby's shock, he approached her and politely introduced himself. He was a member of a community called the United Nuwaubian Nation of Moors, he said, and he wanted to tell her about it.

A few days later he took teen Ruby, without her mother, to see the community for herself. He led her down Bushwick Avenue, a run-down Brooklyn street. But as they arrived at the neighborhood where the Nuwaubians lived, "the whole scenery changed," Garnett told *People Magazine Investigates.* The atmosphere, full of white-robed people of all ages—all of whom were black, like her—felt, she later said, "safe, positive," even "magical."

Founded in New York in the 1960s, the Nuwaubian Nation recruited members with a promise of breaking free of the racism and exploitation that had oppressed African Americans for centuries. Adherents practiced a mixture of Islam, black power and the arcane doctrines of their dynamic leader, who called



EXOTIC RITES Cult leader Dwight "Malachi" York (with followers and, right, arrested in 2002) claimed to be a descendent of ancient Egyptian rulers. Opposite below: York's Tama-Re complex in Eatonton, Ga.

himself Malachi Z. York. When Garnett met him, his preaching, she said, changed her forever. As soon as she turned 16, she quit school and joined the group, believing that York offered a kind of salvation. "My family didn't matter any more," she said. She ran away, lured by York's words: "You are God incarnate."

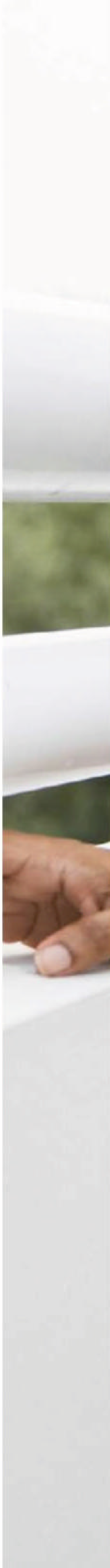
Yet it was obvious that what he really meant was that *he* was God incarnate and that he could convince his followers of it. When someone suggested Garnett, then 19, should marry Malachi York, she was delighted. She had long since learned that York was a polygamist but didn't mind, as she regarded him as "the greatest man on the planet." What she didn't know yet was that York was involved in practices even more sinister than polygamy.

Niki Lopez knew. Her mother was married to York, and she had been taught to regard him as her father. Nonetheless, when Lopez was 13, York began to sexually abuse her, calling it part of her education. When she was 15, York raped her. " 'Why are you making this a big deal?' " she recalled him asking as she tried to resist.

Deeply traumatized, Lopez suffered severe depression. "I hated my life and wished I wasn't born," she told *People*. But she could scarcely expect any sympathy from other cult members who believed York could do no wrong. Indeed, York's power was about to reach new heights. In 1993 he announced that the Nuwaubian civilization would move from Brooklyn to a 400-acre ranch about 80 miles southeast of Atlanta. There

LOST INNOCENCE
Ruby Garnett (left, with her mother on Mother's Day ca. 1988) was 16 when she joined York's cult. "He was the wolf in sheep's clothing, a monster," she says.

WITNESS TO EVIL
Garnett (above, today) has written a book about her years in the cult, *Soul Sacrifice: One Story of Many.*



they would start their own sovereign nation "where no one tells us what to do but us."

There, York abruptly discarded his pseudo-Muslim ideology and announced that he was, in fact, a Native American and would be known henceforth as Chief Black Eagle of the Yamassee Native American Moors of the Creek Nation. Then, just as abruptly, he made an even more astounding claim: He was Yaanuwn, an extraterrestrial visitor from the planet Rizq. And then again he pivoted, declaring himself Neter A'aferti Atum-Re, a pharaoh whose destiny was to rebuild the splendor of ancient Egypt at the compound in Georgia.

Incredibly, his followers—thought to number more than 1,000—took every one of these changes in stride. The white robes gave way to hats-and-boots cowboy gear. The Georgia compound was named Tama-Re and the Nuwaubians built what looked something like an Egyptian-themed miniature golf course. There was a tall arch, covered with colorful hieroglyphics, a sphinx, an obelisk and two 42-ft.-tall pyramids made of wood. People came from all over the country to see this spectacle, and the Egyptian-garbed people who lived there. Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton were among the celebrities who visited, met with York and, unaware of the horrors inside the compound, reacted approvingly. By this time, York had some 30 wives and about 100 children. Most followers lived in miserable double-wide trailers, while York stayed in an ornate two-story home at the compound or an even more luxurious house in Athens, Ga.

Meanwhile, his depravity reached new lows. One day, as Garnett was doing housework, a door flew open and a 5-year-old girl came in screaming and crying. "I have not to this day seen anyone so hysterical," Garnett says. It took quite a while to comfort the child, but eventually the horrible truth came out: York had molested her. She left the compound for good but was too scared to go to authorities about the very young victim.

It was York's estranged son Jacob, then grown, who first went to the FBI. But it was women like Lopez who brought him down, demonstrating the strength to not only leave when her mother stayed but to be among dozens of women to testify against York. In 2004 he was convicted of sex crimes and racketeering and sentenced to 135 years. Today Lopez is an artist and mom in Fort Lauderdale, while Garnett is an author. York resides in a maximum security prison in Colorado. There, for 23 hours each day, he sits in an 84-sq.-ft. cell, his only window a 4-in.-wide slit in the wall that looks out on the prison yard. When he is allowed out for a hearing, he is shackled in leg irons, a belly chain and handcuffs. "Now that he's in prison," says Lopez, "he's living the way he forced us to live."

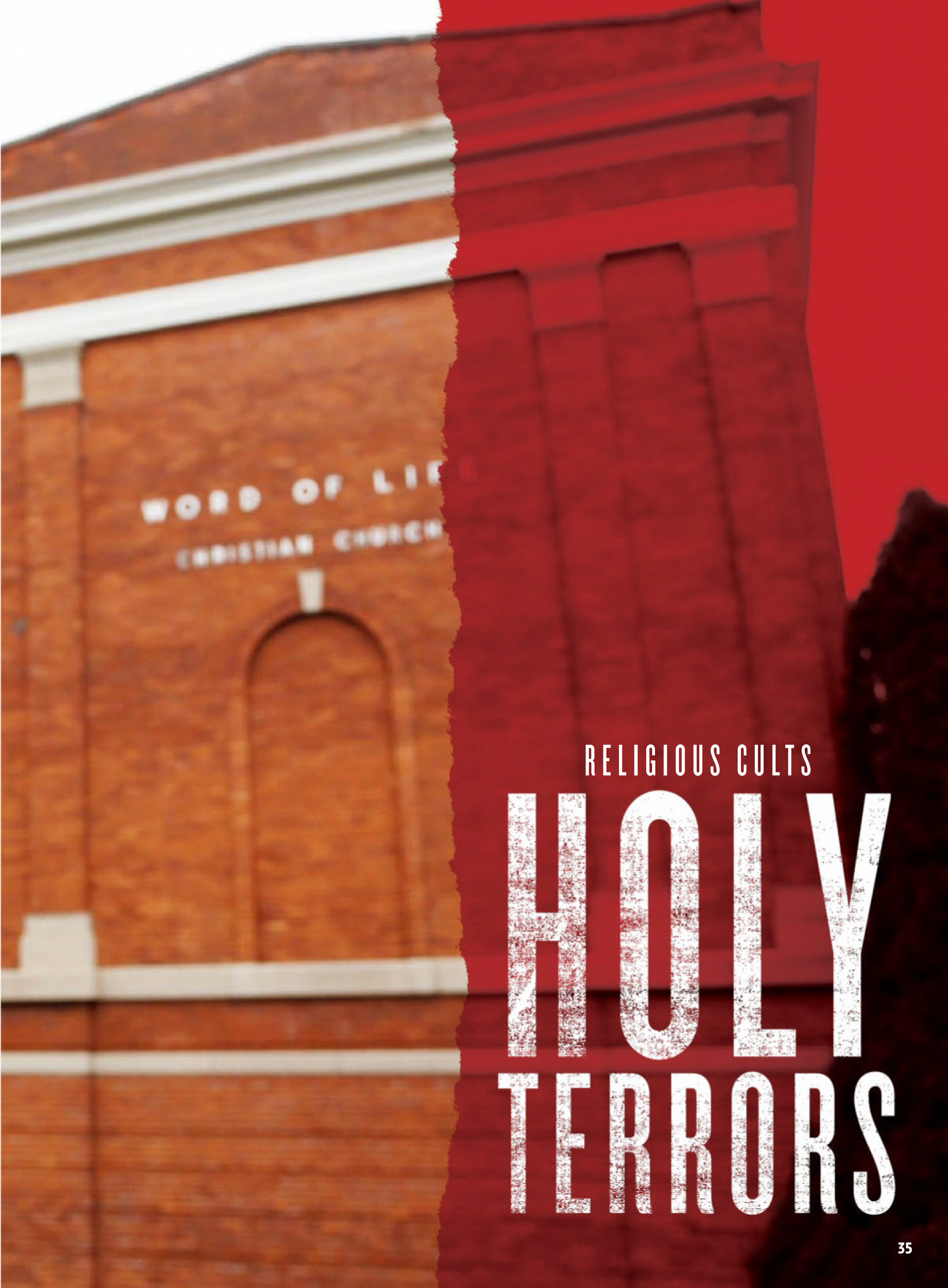
What's your elephant?

> “I KNOW HOW MUCH OF THIS ABUSE RELIES ON SILENCE AND SECRECY. I'M GOING TO TALK ABOUT IT BECAUSE HE WAS EXPECTING ME TO BE SILENT”
>
> **—NIKI LOPEZ**

TOTAL CONTROL
“I lived my whole life being told what to do by this person,” says Lopez of York. Today she is an artist and activist working with the LGBTQ community.

Murder
Child is
Religion
278

TRAGIC END
A teenager was killed at an upstate New York church when the pastor turned her flock against two of its young members.


WORD OF LIF
CHRISTIAN CHURCH

RELIGIOUS CULTS

HOLY TERRORS

R.I.P.
LUCAS
10-12-15

12-HOUR ORDEAL Candles and flowers left in memory of victim Lucas Leonard (above right, with brother Christopher), who was beaten to death by members of his Chadwicks, N.Y., church after they accused him of witchcraft.

WORD OF LIFE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

TRAITORS AMONG US

Enraged when a pair of brothers announced they were leaving the church, a pastor and her followers viciously attacked them, leaving one of the teenagers severely injured and the other dead

MORE THAN 300 YEARS AFTER 20 innocent people were executed after the Salem witch trials, a 29-year-old preacher in upstate Chadwicks, N.Y., announced to her flock that one of its members was practicing witchcraft. History was about to repeat itself—and an innocent life would be taken.

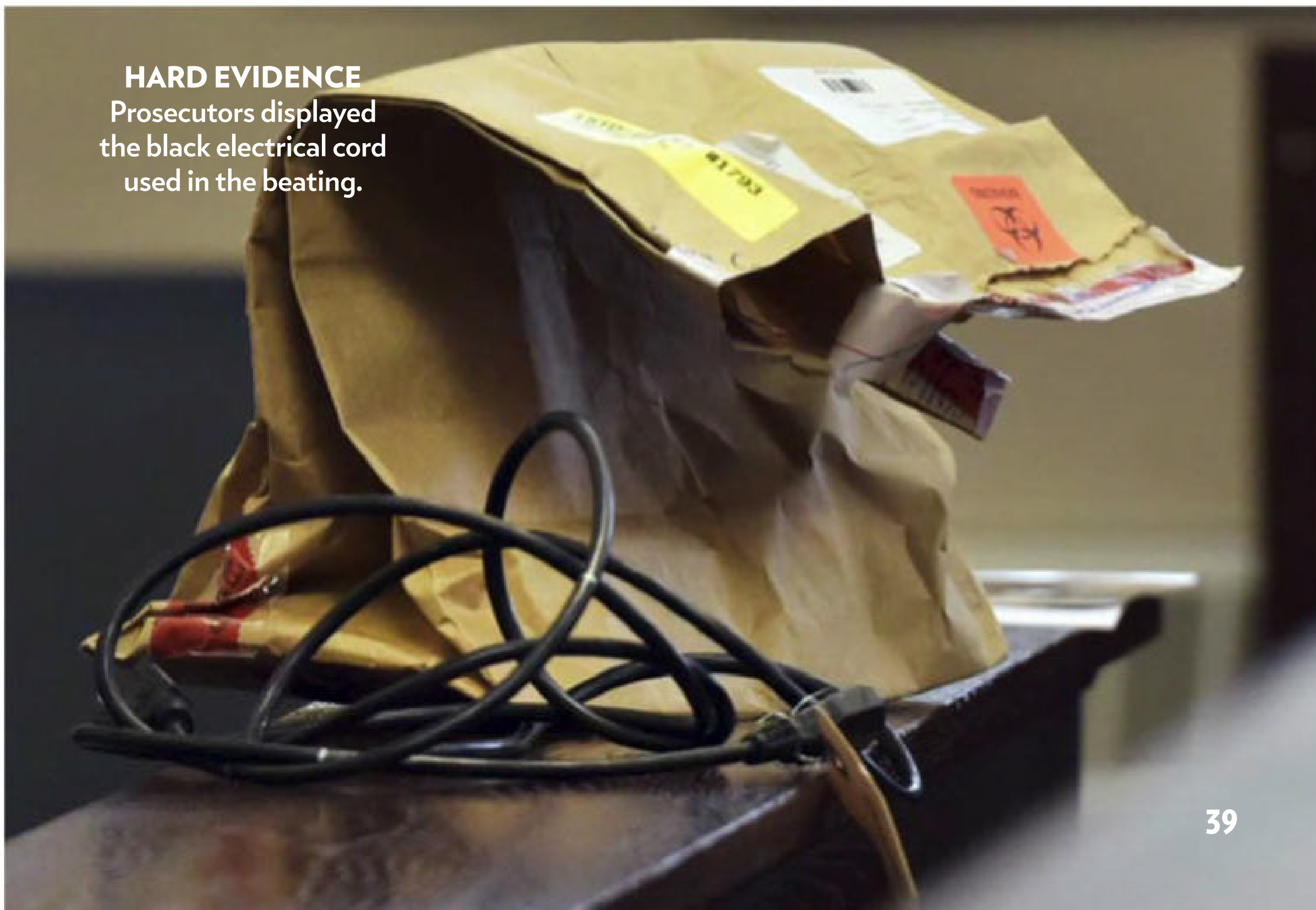
The Word of Life Christian Church had started out innocently enough as a Bible study group that met in people's homes. The stocky, bearded minister who conducted the sessions was Jerry Irwin, a man described as "soft-spoken" but strict in his fundamentalist approach to Christian faith. "It started off as a good church," says one former member, Nathan Ames. When Irwin left for a time to take over another church, the fellowship grew, as other pastors, and even a rabbi, were invited to speak to the group and share their love of Scripture. In time, members were able to buy a three-story brick schoolhouse to meet in.

The trouble started when Irwin returned to the congregation in the mid-1990s. He declared himself a prophet, a seer, a clairvoyant. He said that he could peer inside buildings and sniff out sin wherever it lay. What's more, says Ames, Irwin began to teach that the Word of Life Christian Church was "the only way to heaven." "At first Jerry Irwin wanted to do good," Ames says. "But after he started getting power, he grew to like it, and all of a sudden he had this power over people, and he worked to maintain it. He was a snake who liked to play games."

Irwin moved his family into the third floor of the schoolhouse and began assigning enormous numbers of tasks to members, so that they had time for little else. "You were home sleeping, working at your regular job, or you were at the church," Ames recalls. Meanwhile, Irwin did all he could to sow suspicions among the members, so that their loyalties would be to him alone. "The pastor talked s--- to wives about their husbands," says Chadwicks Handville, an ex-member. "He'd pit kids against their parents and used relatives against each other."

TOWN VIGIL
Neighbors in Chadwicks, N.Y., gathered to remember Lucas Leonard after he bled to death following the group attack.

THE VICTIM
Christopher Leonard (in court in 2015) and his brother Lucas were accused by sect members of having a voodoo doll.



HARD EVIDENCE Prosecutors displayed the black electrical cord used in the beating.

FREE AGAIN
"I was worried for years that I was going to hell," says former Word of Life member Nathan Ames (in Chadwicks). "It was a cult—they're controlling people."

It was classic cult behavior, and so was the Irwin family's sense of entitlement. The schoolhouse where they lived was substantially more luxurious than the homes of many members. There was a trampoline, a basketball court and a whirlpool bath. The Irwins filled their home with exotic birds, rabbits and show-quality Yorkshire terriers, which they bred. The task of cleaning up after all of these animals fell to members.

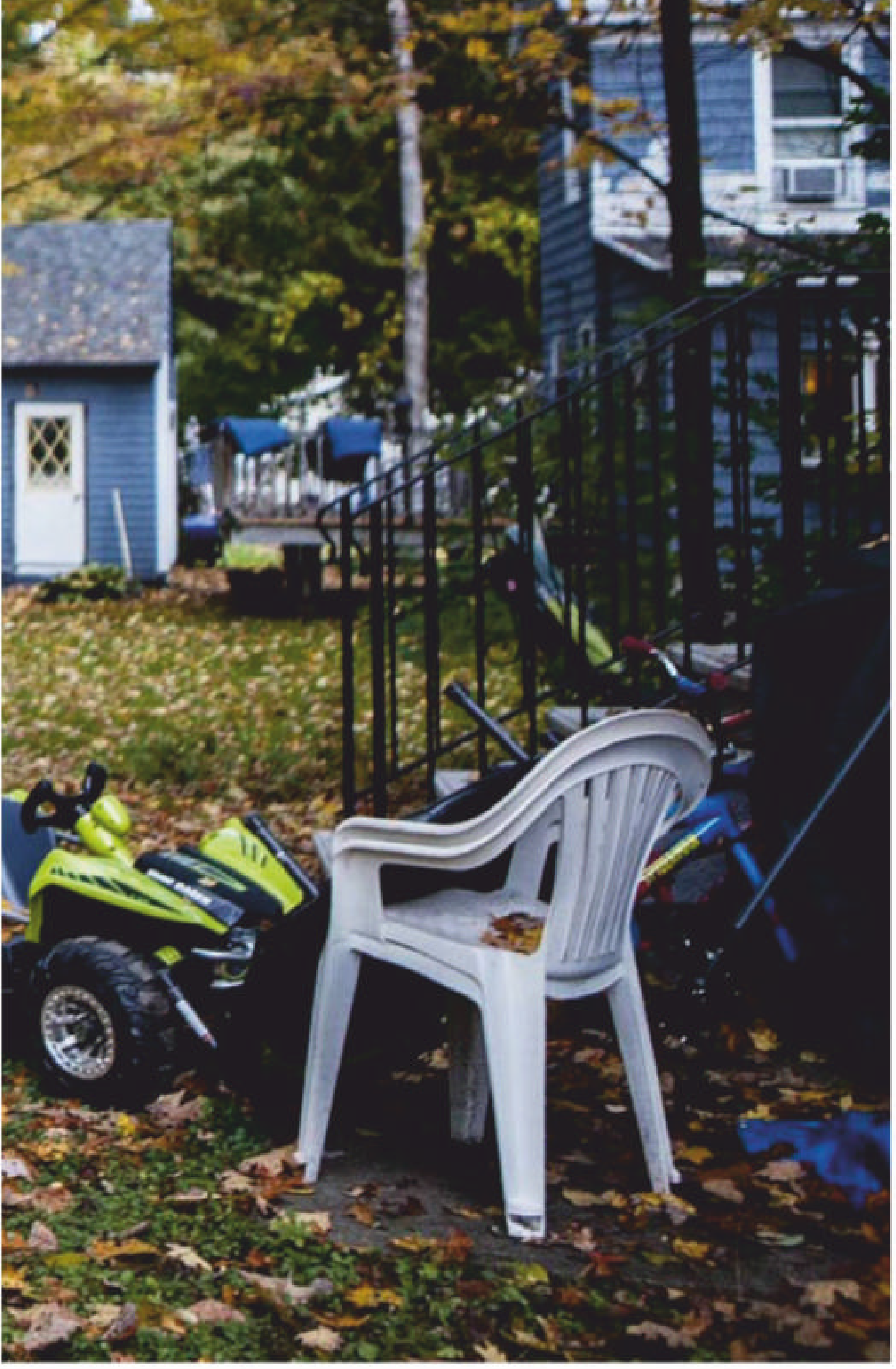
But by far the worst aspect of Word of Life was the way it treated children. Irwin was both a great believer in corporal punishment and a harsh critic of public schools. The church's own school, meanwhile, more closely resembled a prison. Children sat at homemade desks surrounded by plywood walls. Each child was issued a small American flag, which, when raised, signalled a request to use the bathroom. They also had a red-cross flag that they used to request help with schoolwork. No other communication was allowed.

The teacher at this nightmare institution of learning was frequently pastor Irwin's daughter Tiffanie, whose status in the church would grow until 2012, when her father died of a heart attack. By the time she took his place, attendance had dwindled. Members had seen the church for what it was—a cult—and left.

One such young person was Lucas Leonard, whose parents were among the church's most devoted members. At 19, he'd had enough. "He told me, 'I'm outta here, I'm joining the service,'" recalls a neighbor, James Constantine. But Lucas Leonard never got the chance to serve his country. At an evening gathering on Oct. 11, 2015, Tiffanie Irwin made her announcement that someone was practicing witchcraft and summoned Leonard for a "counseling session."

At Word of Life, a counseling session was no therapeutic discussion. It involved physical and mental abuse until its victims said whatever they were ordered to say. Church members, including Lucas's parents, Bruce and Deborah Leonard, surrounded and beat him, using a power cord as a whip. The attack lasted on and off for 12 hours, during which the crowd also turned on Lucas's 17-year-old brother Christopher.

It was Christopher who first realized Lucas's life was ebbing away. His brother was "laying on the ground, moaning," he later testified. "I rushed over and saw he wasn't breathing." Lucas died from injuries sustained during the prolonged attack; Christopher was hospitalized but survived. Tiffanie Irwin, the boys' parents and six other church members were convicted of crimes related to the beatings (see box, page 41). How could they have killed Lucas Leonard? One answer came from former member Elizabeth Ames. "Unless you live through something like that, it's hard to grasp," she said. "You don't realize you're breathing carbon dioxide until you breathe oxygen again."



CHURCH MEMBERS CONVICTED

MEMBERS OF THE SECRETIVE SECT ARE NOW BEHIND BARS FOR THE 2015 KILLING

1. Pastor Tiffanie Irwin pleaded guilty to manslaughter and assault in the deadly beating of Lucas Leonard and was sentenced to 12 years in prison. **2.** Her mother, Traci, pleaded guilty to unlawful imprisonment. **3.** Joseph Irwin, 22, pleaded guilty to assault. **4.** Daniel, another brother, was sentenced to five years for unlawful imprisonment. **5.** Leonard's father, Bruce, was sentenced to 10 years for taking part in the deadly beating. **6.** Leonard's mother, Deborah, was sentenced to five years. **7.** Half sister Sarah Ferguson was convicted of manslaughter and is serving 25 years behind bars. Church members David, **8.**, and Linda Morey, **9.**, were sentenced to five years for their roles in the attack.

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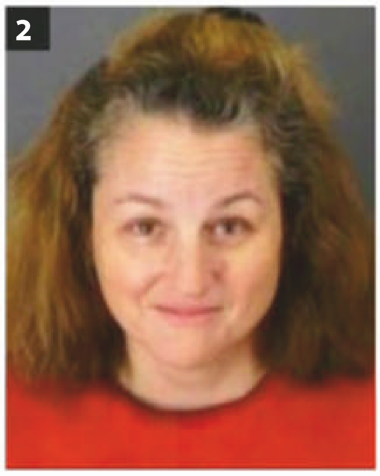
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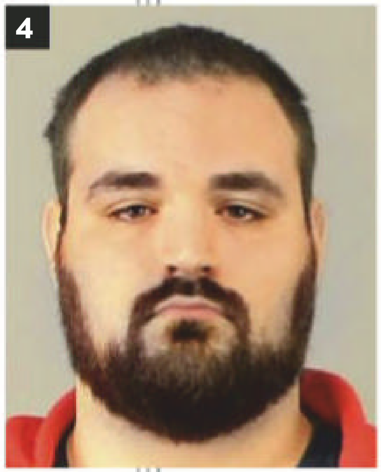
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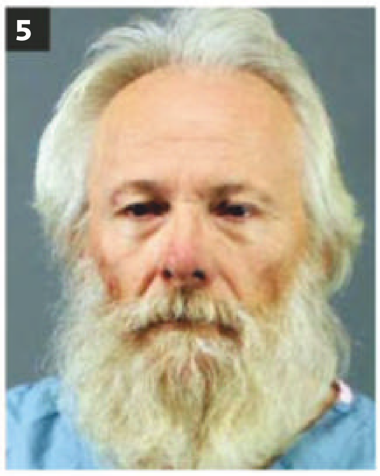
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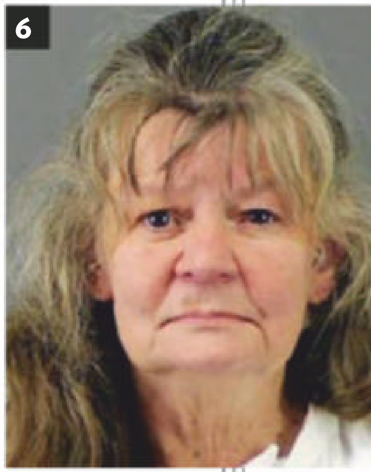
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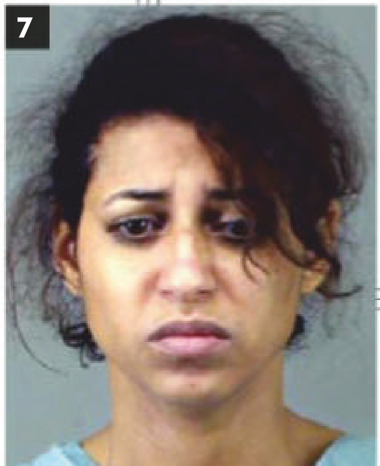
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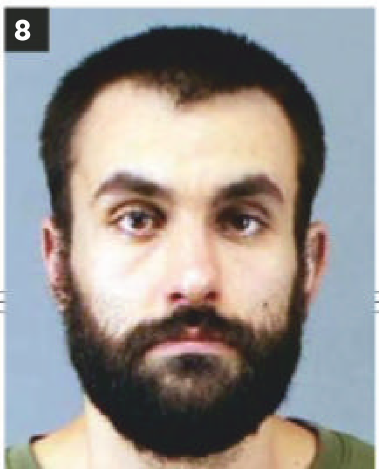
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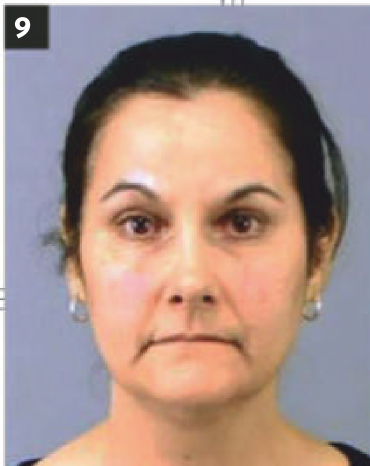
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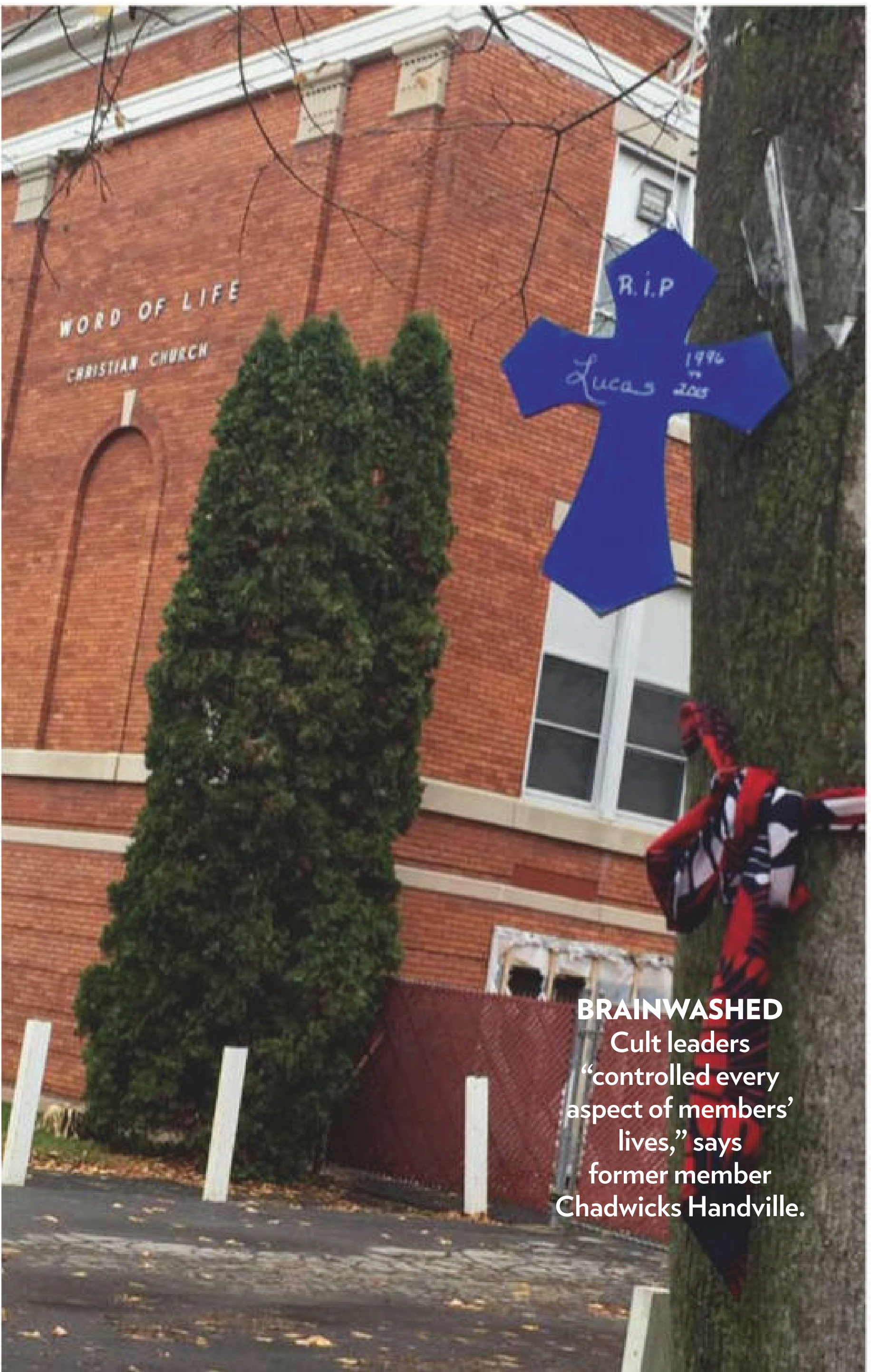


BRAINWASHED Cult leaders "controlled every aspect of members' lives," says former member Chadwicks Handville.

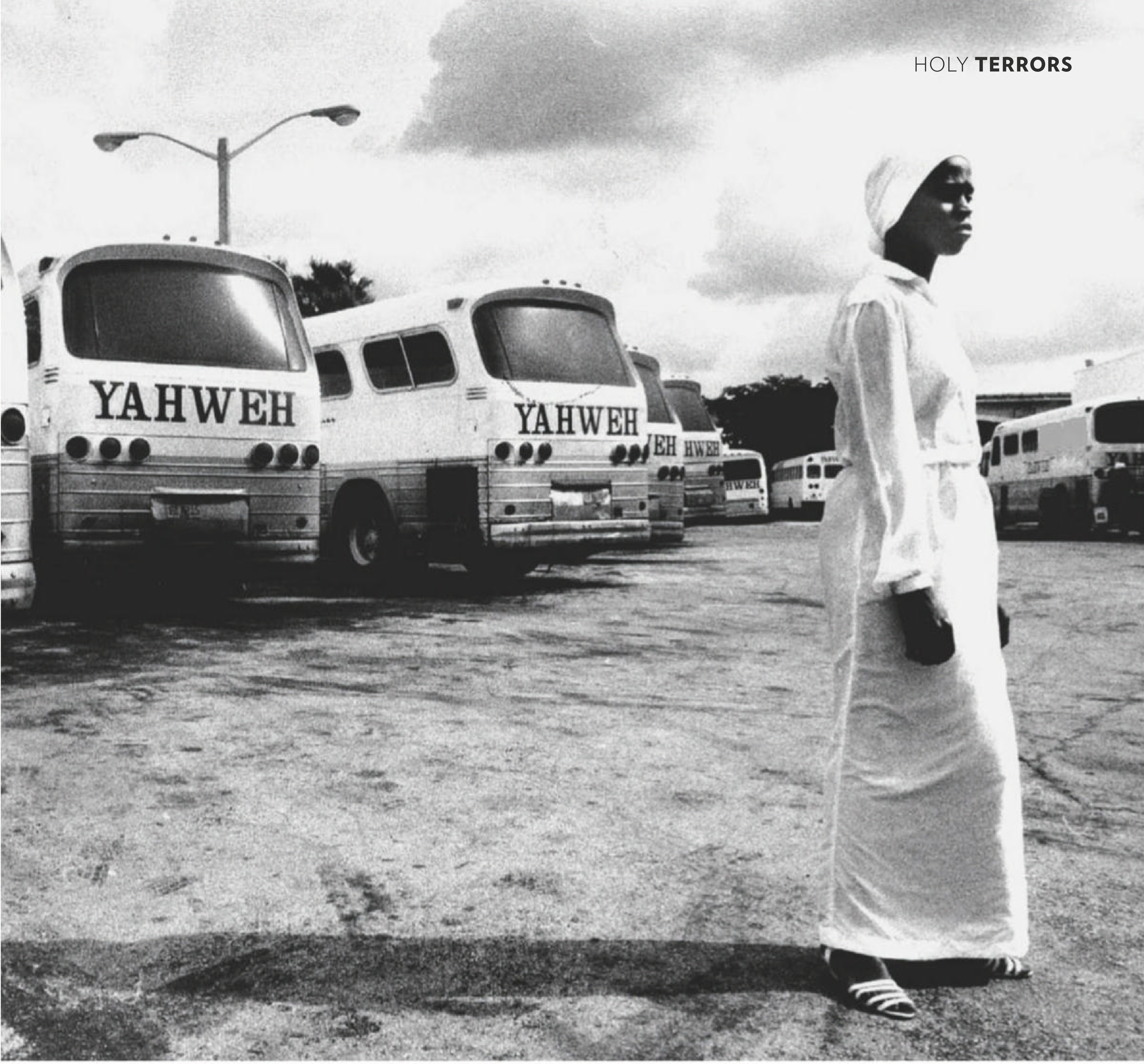
YAHWEH
FF 6168

NATION OF YAHWEH

FALSE IDOL

Miami's messiah of the streets
used murder and shockingly violent
rituals to keep his flock in line

SUNDAY OCT. 7, 1990, was Yahweh Ben Yahweh Day in Miami. The charismatic leader of a separatist religious sect that claimed 20,000 followers nationwide, Ben Yahweh, known for his long, flowing white robes and turbans, was also an economic force in the city, with an $8 million business and real estate empire. Honored that day by the city's mayor in recognition of his efforts to revitalize black neighborhoods blighted by poverty and ravaged by race riots 10 years before, Ben Yahweh addressed a crowd of more than 2,000 followers



who listened rapt as he explained "How to Move from Poverty to Riches." Scarcely a month later Ben Yahweh (his name means "God the son of God" in Hebrew) was behind bars, charged along with 15 of his Nation of Yahweh followers with multiple counts of murder, attempted murder and racketeering, among other crimes. "Yahweh Ben Yahweh ran an organization that made millions of dollars using murder, extortion and arson," former federal prosecutor David DeMaio told *People Magazine Investigates.*

FBI agents described him as a cult leader who ruled his sect like a brutal medieval despot, presiding over a reign of terror that began nearly a decade before. According to former follower Kahlil Amani, Ben Yahweh rallied followers to retaliate against dissident cult members whom he dubbed the Hypocrites. "I didn't think it would come to fruition," Amani told *People.* "I thought it was more hyperbole and sermon."

Amani learned otherwise when, in 1981, Yahweh's bodyguards, the so-called "death angels" who carried stainless-

HERO COMPLEX
At its height, the cult of Yahweh Ben Yahweh, born Hulon Mitchell Jr. (left), operated schools, stores, restaurants, a hotel and a fleet of cars, trucks and buses (above, in Miami)—all painted white.

CIVIC PRIDE
Hailed by city fathers on Yahweh Ben Yahweh Day in 1990 (left), the cult leader also received a humanitarian award from the Miami Urban League in 1987.

CONVERT
"'Your earthly father was nothing,'" ex-follower Khalil Amani (above, in 2018) recalls Ben Yahweh telling him. "'Now you're my son.'"

MOTHER'S GRIEF
Louretta Green, the mother of an ex-Nation of Yahweh member beheaded by the cult's security squad, sobbed outside the 1992 trial of her son's killers in Fort Lauderdale.

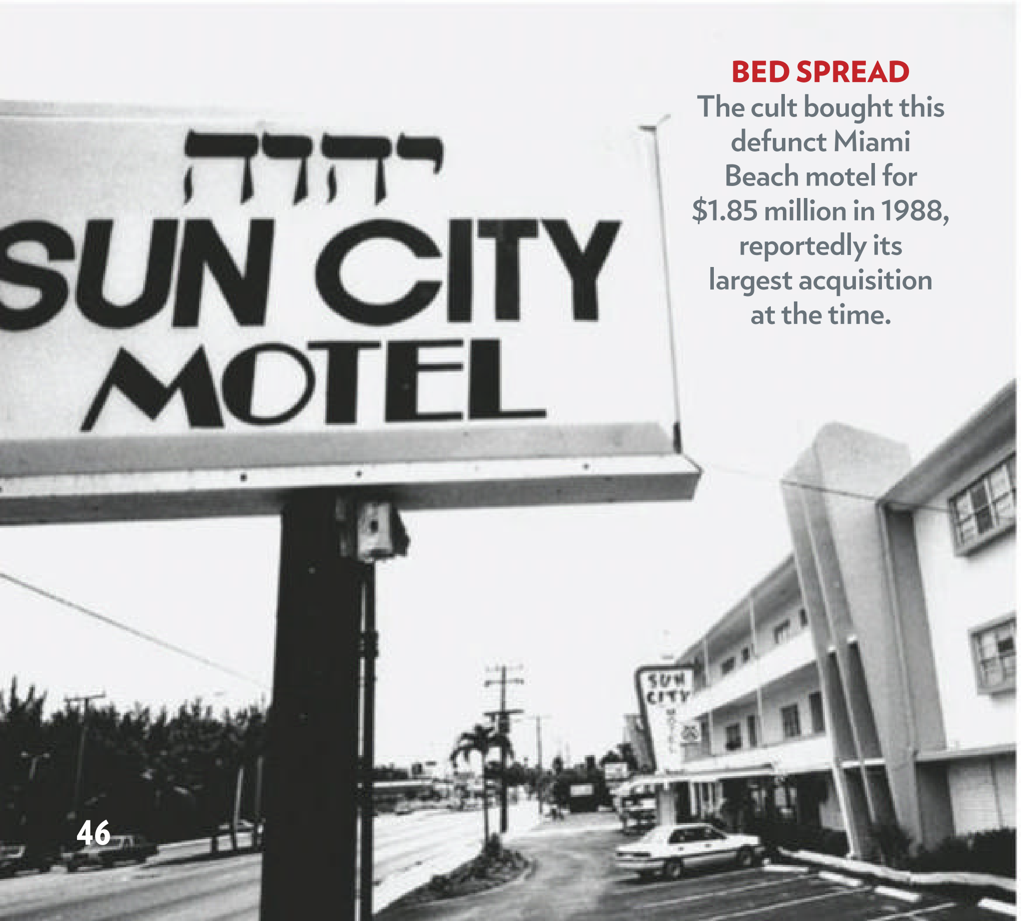
steel machetes, assaulted Aston Green, a member of a splinter group, at the cult's Temple of Love headquarters in Miami. As Amani watched, it became a scene of horror. "I saw a hammer," he recalls. "He's just being pounded out on the floor. I could still hear him breathing with that sound of death." Grisly evidence was later discovered in the swamps of the Everglades. "We [found] a head and body pieces," DeMaio told *People*. The cult was "sending a message with the killing."

Formerly an abandoned warehouse in a rundown neighborhood, the temple had been purchased by Ben Yahweh with funds raised from followers. "People gave homes, cars, bank accounts," Amani said of the goods that cult members handed over upon initiation. Outwardly the temple was seen as an inspirational shrine to the Nation of Yahweh's supposed civic beneficence. Inside, it was the scene of multiple atrocities. Amani was witness to a gruesome show of power in which Ben Yahweh, who called black Africans "the chosen people of the world, the true Jews of the Bible," ordered all the men in the cult to line up and drop their pants. "He wanted to see who was circumcised and who was not," Amani told *People*. Those who were not were operated on then and there by the cult leader himself, with no anesthesia. "He would just squat between their legs," Amani said. "Grown men were crying." For his women acolytes, cult-initiation rites included performing sex acts.

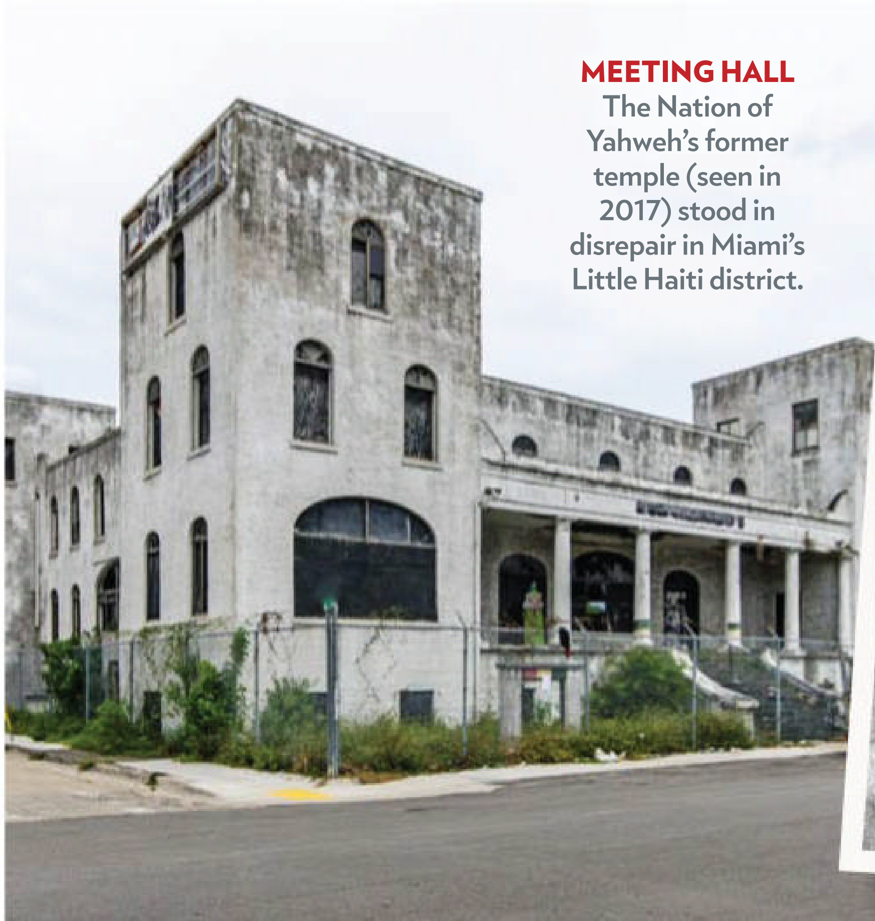
The son of a Baptist preacher, Ben Yahweh was born Hulon Mitchell Jr. in Oklahoma and had reportedly earned a degree in economics by the time he settled in Miami in the late 1970s. Then calling himself Ock Moshe (Hebrew for "Brother Moses"), he came to prominence after 18 people were left dead and $100 million in property was destroyed in the racially divisive Miami riots of 1980. The violence broke out after an all-white jury acquitted four Miami police officers of manslaughter charges in the killing of an unarmed black youth.

Preaching a call for self-reliance and separatism from "white devils," Ben Yahweh appealed to Miami's alienated and poor. He established his religious sect with the trappings of Judaism, Christianity and the Nation of Islam and declared himself a new Messiah. "I am the one the whole earth has been waiting on," he said.

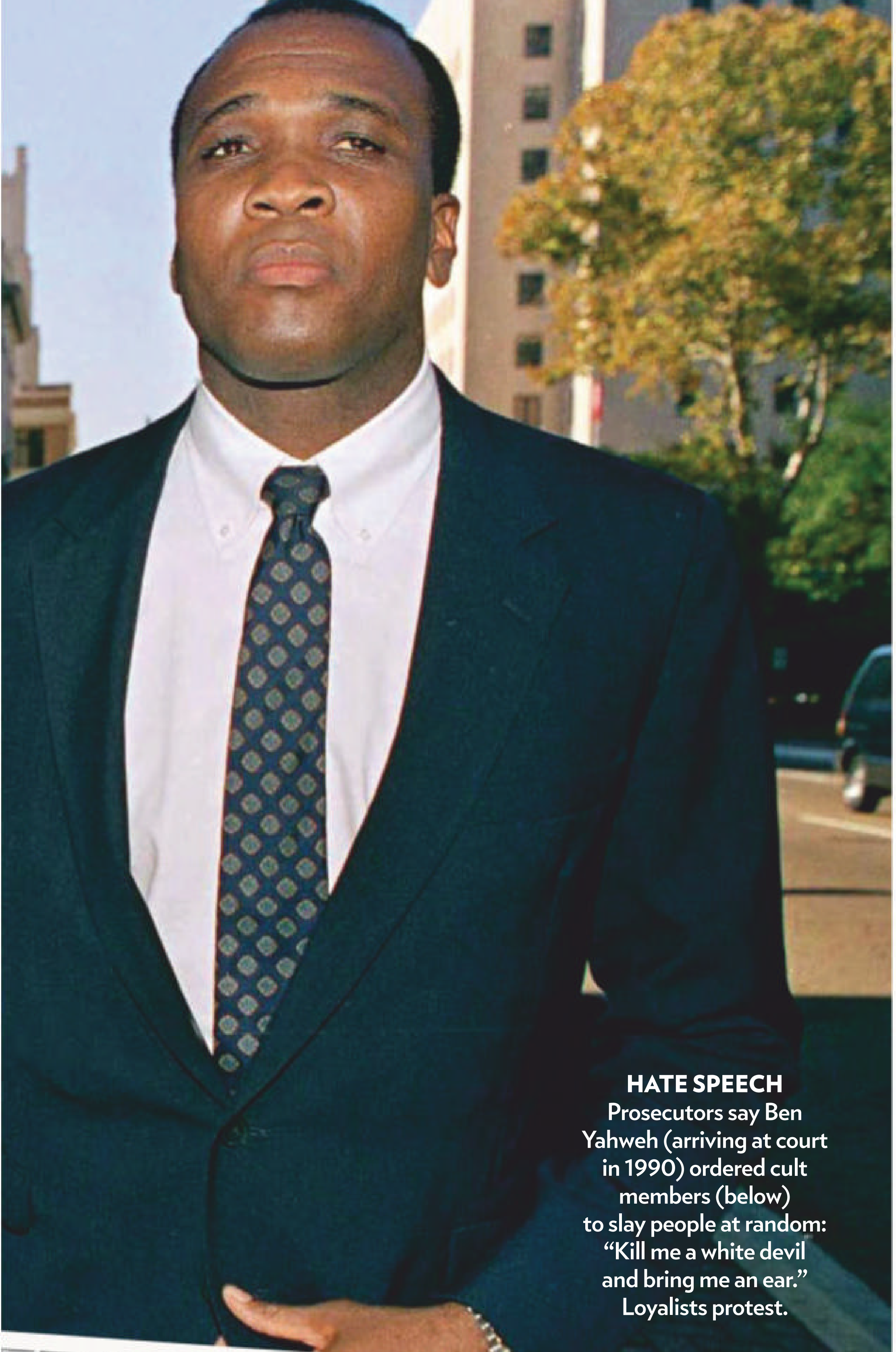
By 1981 the Nation of Yahweh had grown to more than 200 followers. Even as its leader reveled in his success and good press—"The world's greatest attraction is in your midst," he once immodestly noted while addressing Miami business leaders, "I'm here!"—he was



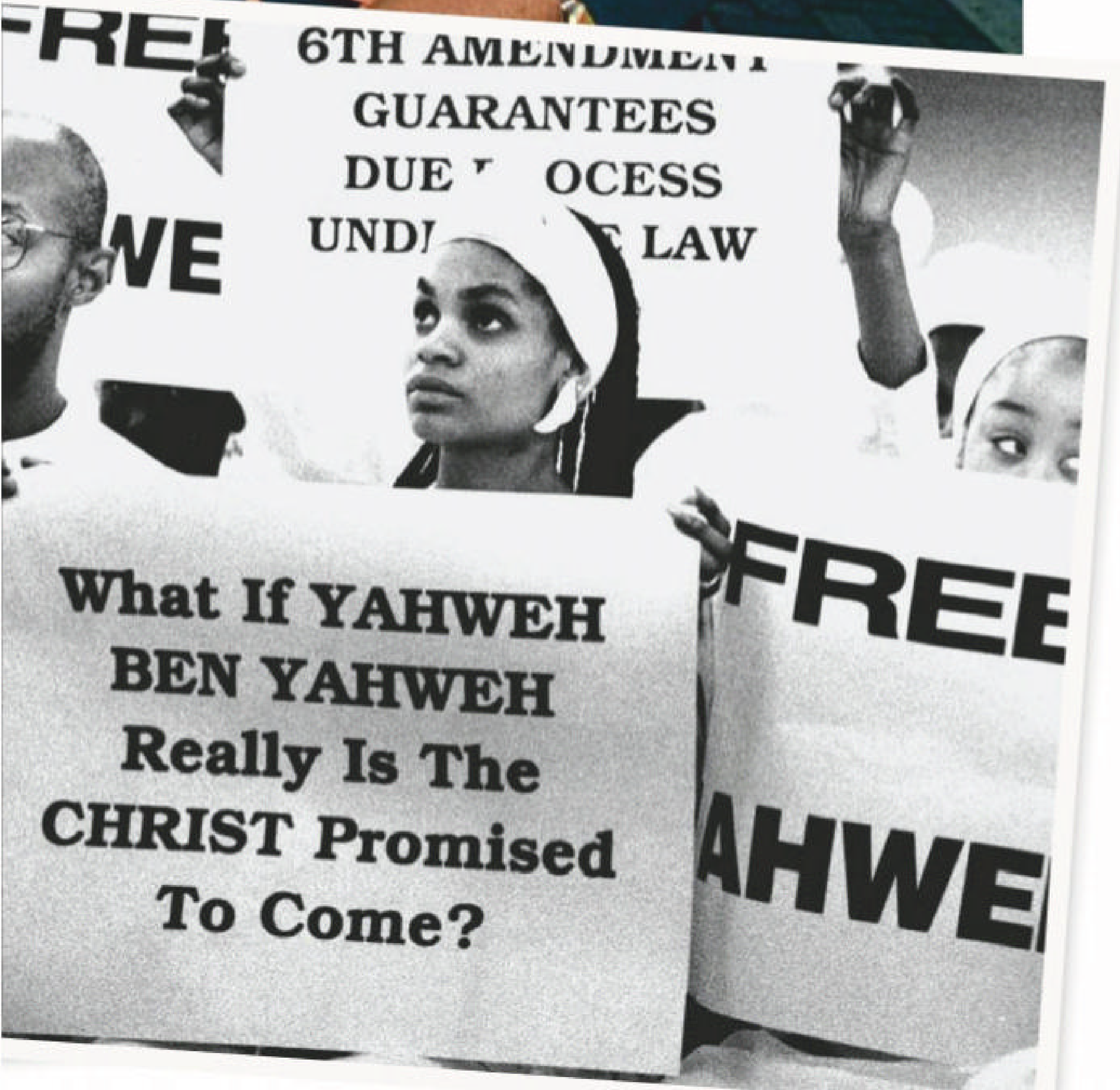
BED SPREAD
The cult bought this defunct Miami Beach motel for $1.85 million in 1988, reportedly its largest acquisition at the time.



MEETING HALL
The Nation of Yahweh's former temple (seen in 2017) stood in disrepair in Miami's Little Haiti district.



HATE SPEECH
Prosecutors say Ben Yahweh (arriving at court in 1990) ordered cult members (below) to slay people at random: "Kill me a white devil and bring me an ear." Loyalists protest.



> TO DO WHAT HE DID, AND THE WAY HE DID IT, I PERSONALLY BELIEVE THAT HE WAS JUST PLAIN EVIL"
> **—HERB COUSINS, RETIRED FBI AGENT**

being investigated for the murder that would eventually lead to his undoing. When cult member Robert Rozier, a former St. Louis Cardinals pro football player, was arrested in 1986 for the murder of a holdout tenant in an apartment building the Nation had purchased for $500,000, Ben Yahweh excommunicated him, insisting that his loyal henchman had been acting on his own.

Betrayed, "Rozier started talking, and he had a lot to say," prosecutor DeMaio told *People.* Rozier confessed to killing six people on Ben Yahweh's orders, and yet four more years would pass before his arrest. Meanwhile the leader's aura grew within the cult. "The more crime we got away with," Amani says, "the more it became evident that he was God."

Ben Yahweh finally crashed to earth in 1992 when a jury found him guilty of conspiracy to commit murder. He was sentenced to 18 years in federal prison. Paroled in 2001, he died of prostate cancer six years later. The Nation of Yahweh was unique among cults in the public approval it received, says DeMaio, a tribute to its leader's evil genius. "When you have someone with his level of charisma and the ability to manipulate the media and local politicians the way he was able to do—that's a dangerous combination."

FREE
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Bible Studies
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Global Spirit Army
Behind The Veil
Roman Catholicism Against Itself
MESSAGES IN THE REVOLUTIONARY WAY
BOOK 8
Whom Do Men Say I Am?

SOUL SEARCHER
Deborah (Lila) Green proselytized at a flea market in Gallup, N.Mex., in 2009.

AGGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY MISSIONARY TRAINING CORPS

GENERAL'S ORDERS

No toys, no school and no medical care—life for the children of a New Mexico cult led to accusations of criminal abuse

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IT HAD BEEN SOME TIME since Maura Schmierer had seen her friends Lila and Jim Green. And though she'd always known that they were a little unusual and very religious, she was nonetheless shocked by what happened when the Greens came to visit her and her family in rural California in the early 1980s.

First Lila dropped to the floor, screeching like a woman in labor. Jim explained that she was "birthing children into God's kingdom." This struck Maura as pretty peculiar, and she might have dismissed it if not for what happened next. The Greens told Maura's husband, Steve, that he had a demon inside of him, which had to be "cast out." They placed their hands on

1

him, and suddenly Steve crashed to the floor and began writhing like a sidewinder snake.

Perhaps, the Schmierers thought, there really was something to the Greens' intense Christianity. Within a year they moved their three children to Sacramento, where the Greens had established their new church, Free Love Ministries, and had acquired a building where members were invited to live.

Lila Green was the church's main attraction, for she claimed to have the gift of prophecy. She spoke with slashing intensity about the consequences of sin and was obsessed with demons, believing they had the power to take over her followers' bodies and souls. Church members have said they were required to attend periodic "deliverance sessions" to have their demons removed. It was not fun: Participants would scream, choke, writhe and sometimes vomit while Lila circulated among them, barking at the evil spirits to go away. To former member Julie Gudino, it seemed like "a supernatural experience." In retrospect she reckons the whole tableau was a reflection of church members' desire for acceptance. But at the time, these dramatic demonstrations of Lila's "gifts" gave her and Jim tremendous power over their 50-some disciples.

In 1985 former followers say that they came up with a scheme to leverage that power. The Greens changed the name of the church to the Aggressive Christianity Missionary Training Corps; members were now required to wear khaki uniforms, and each was given a military rank that reflected his or her degree of spiritual development. Naturally the Greens were declared generals. "We were gonna be gung ho soldiers for Jesus," says Gudino—and like all soldiers, they would owe their generals eager, unquestioning obedience.

As the Greens increased their authority over their followers, they also became more judgmental of them. Lila changed her name to Deborah,

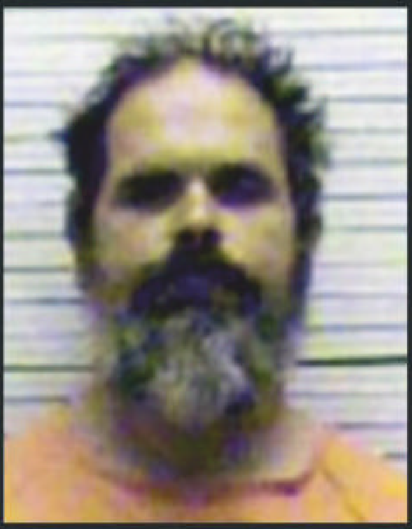
AGGRESSIVE RESPONSE: MORE THAN 100 CHARGES BROUGHT

The 'generals' and followers are accused of kidnapping, child abuse and neglect in the death of a 12-year-old boy and other cases. They deny all charges

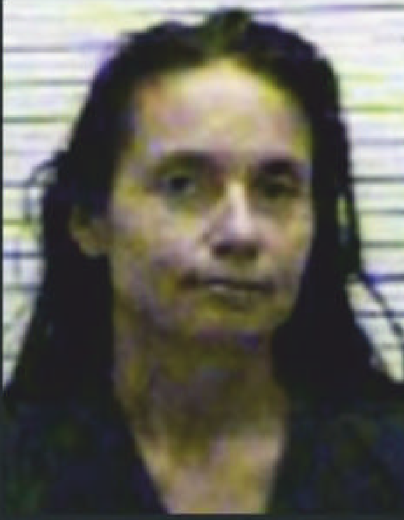
DEBORAH GREEN, 71

JIM GREEN, 73

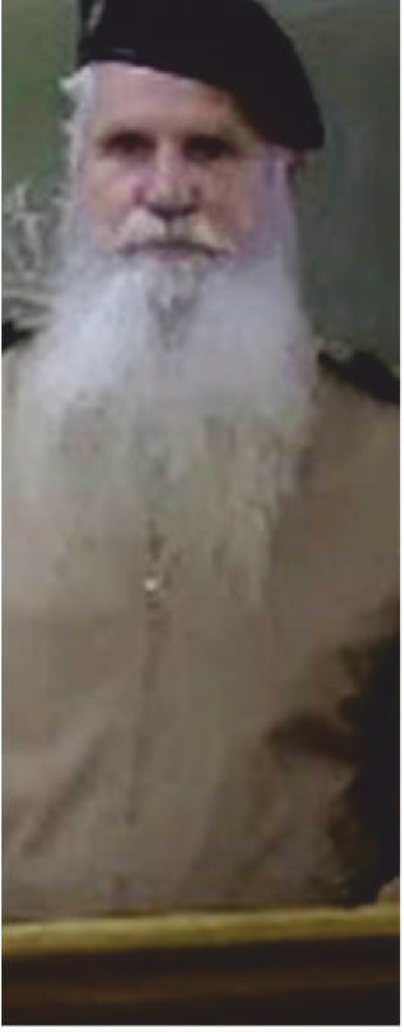
PETER GREEN, 55



JOSHUA GREEN, 43



STACEY MILLER, 48



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SPIRITUAL QUEST GONE WRONG
1. Deborah and Jim Green modeled their cult on the Salvation Army.
2. "We were cut off," says ex-member Maura Schmierer (with her ex-husband and children ca. 1976).
3. "I want people to understand the whole idea of mind control," says Schmierer (ca. 2011).

because the biblical Deborah was a judge of the Israelites. She preached with redoubled fury, prophesying damnation for nearly everyone. To those who wondered where the love of Christ fit into this worldview, she answered: "You're backslid and you're lazy and you're compromising!"

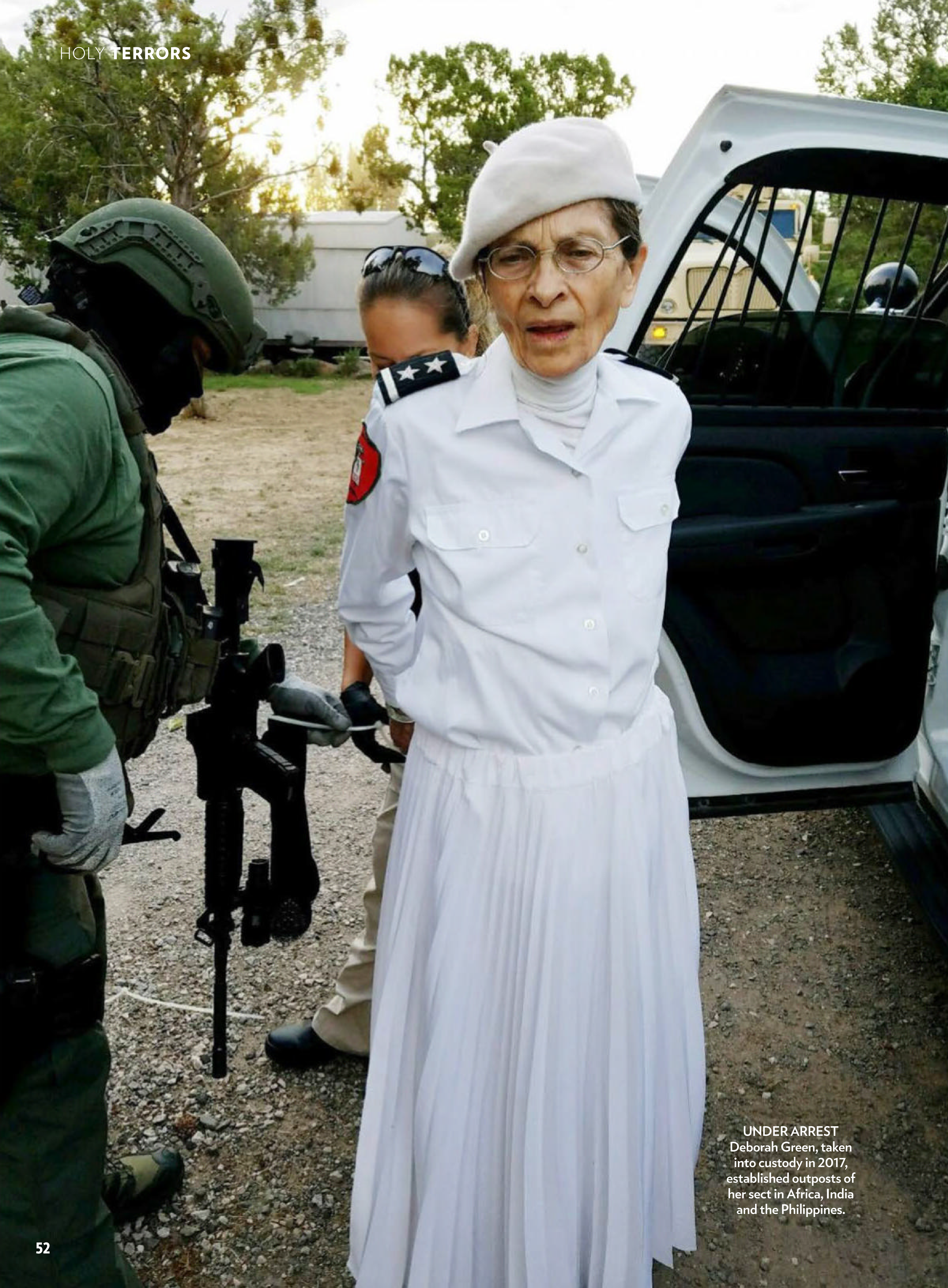
Most members bought it. But Schmierer struggled to accept this Aggressive Christianity. What particularly upset her was the way she was ordered to raise her children—with no toys, no TV and endless chores. Worst of all, says Schmierer, Deborah told her, "You need to whip those kids," even her 2-year-old daughter: "They wanted me to beat her with a belt because she wasn't potty-trained." According to Schmierer , when she refused, Deborah banished her to an unheated shed with no toilet. She was shunned for three months before being expelled from the cult altogether.

Free at last from the Greens, Schmierer says, "I came to understand very quickly that I had been in a cult." In 1988 she sued the church to get her children back and to expose the Greens. The Greens, however, never showed up in court to contest her accusations; Schmierer was awarded custody of the children, and the church was ordered to pay more than $1 million in damages.

Generals Deborah and Jim apparently decided to beat a hasty retreat. First the compound (the church's only substantial asset) was all but destroyed. Then the church relocated, first to Oregon, then, in 1992, to remote Fence Lake, N.Mex. Frequent child abuse has been alleged at the group's gated commune there, where members lived in barracks-like communal houses. "These kids were off the grid," says Cibola County sheriff Tony Mace. "They were forcing them to work, not getting them medical attention or providing them with an education." One child named in legal documents was so malnourished she suffered from rickets—her legs became bent and deformed, and there were ghastly rumors that she was being molested. (She was removed from the cult and placed in foster care.) Yet when Mace's officers attempted to investigate reports of abuse, cult members "used to meet us at the gates with guns," he says.

After decades the Greens' iron grip finally slipped when former member Bill Miller contacted authorities last year about the welfare and safety of his son, whom he had left behind when he was excommunicated by the group years earlier. With probable cause that a crime had been committed, Mace's agents raided the property last summer and made a grim discovery: the shallow grave of 12-year-old Enoch Miller, whose remains had been buried for so long that it was impossible to conclusively determine how he had died, although authorities believe it was from the flu. "We learned he died a horrible death," says Mace.

In August 2017 the Greens and seven other church members, including Enoch's mother, Stacey Miller, were arrested on charges including kidnapping, child abuse and neglect leading to death. The group's website has published a defiant statement insisting that all of the charges are "utterly," "totally" and "incredibly" false. But in 2018 a jury found Deborah Green guilty of kidnapping and child abuse; she was sentenced to 72 years in prison. The other eight defendants are awaiting trial.



UNDER ARREST
Deborah Green, taken into custody in 2017, established outposts of her sect in Africa, India and the Philippines.

ALLEGEDLY ORDERED TO KIDNAP

HOW ONE EX-MEMBER WAS PUSHED SO FAR THAT SHE HAD TO QUIT

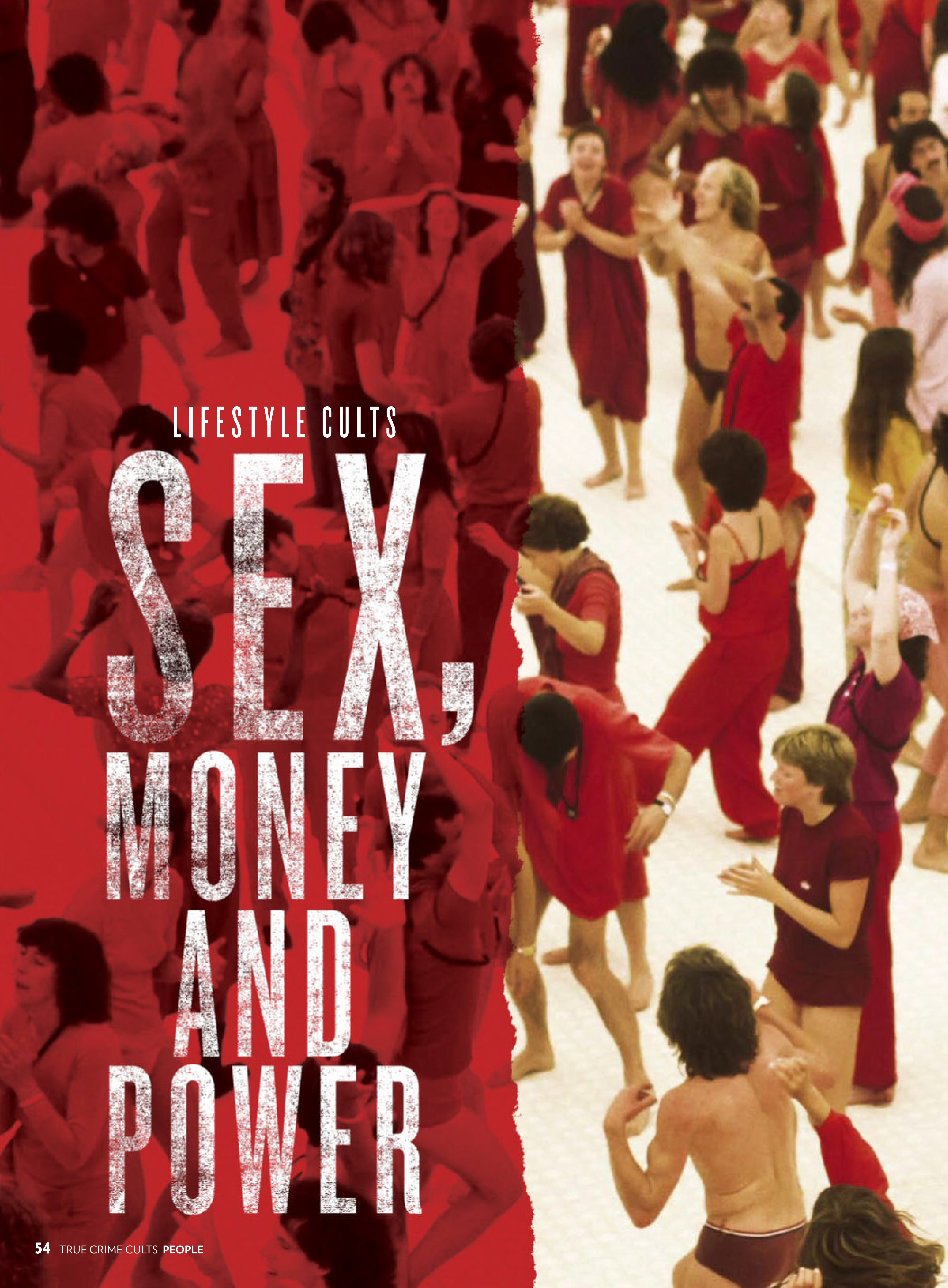
LOYAL SOLDIER
Counterclockwise from top: Julie Gudino with her ex-husband; in New Mexico ca. 1992; and today.

"I was young, and they gave me a place to live and a job," recalls Julie Gudino, a former follower of Deborah and Jim Green. She was 16 when she met the cult leaders with her then husband, escaping a life of gangs and drugs in California. "I wanted to be part of this group, to be one of the passionate ones."

As a soldier in "God's Army," Gudino worked endless hours on the orders of the "generals." One task was selling banana bread to make money for the cult. She would later discover that while she was on the road, her son was locked "in a cellar to cry all day without food and water" and spanked "with a two-by-four that had a nail in it" back in New Mexico.

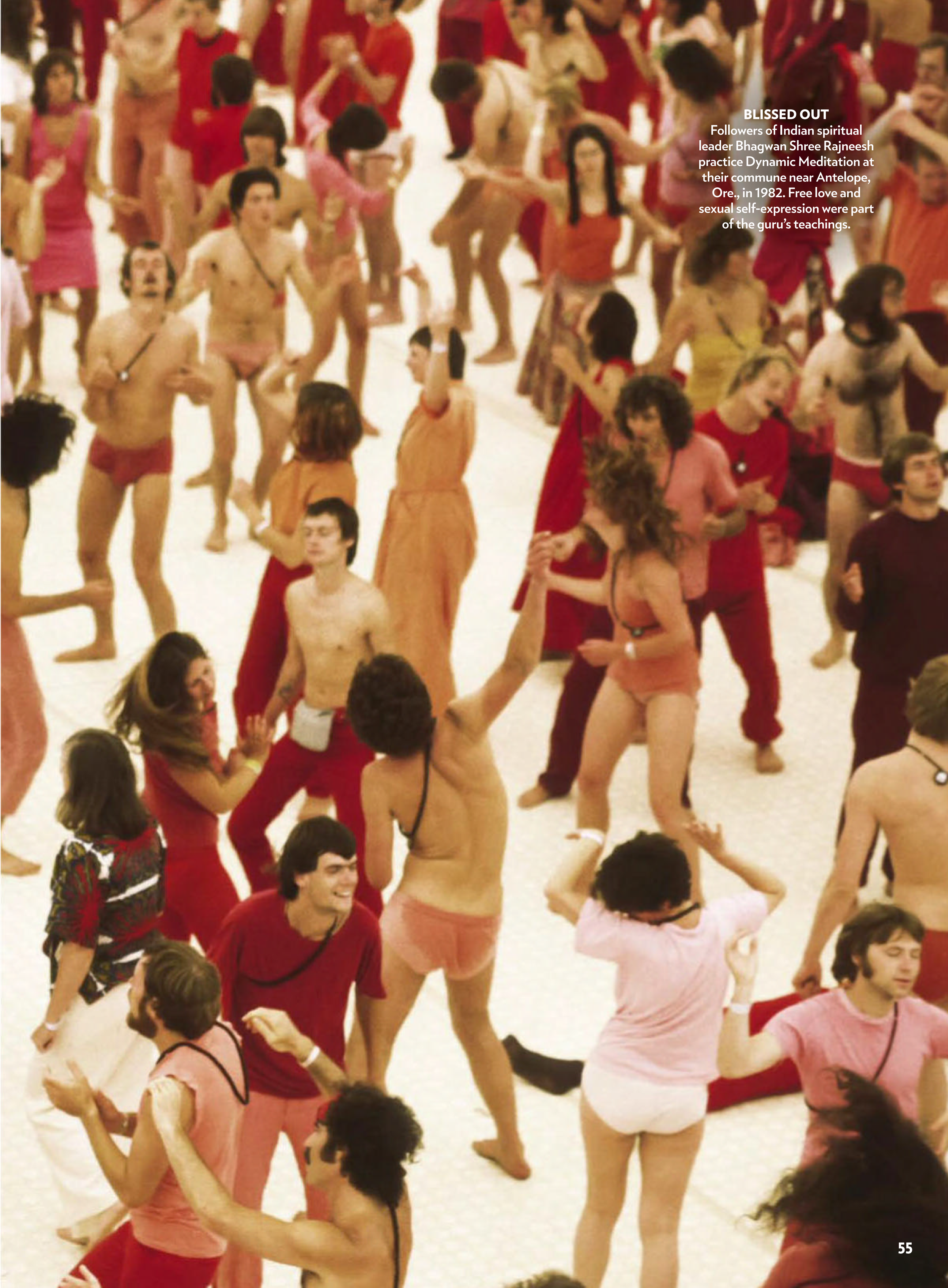
It was another task, however, that would lead her to break with the group forever. In the late 1990s Deborah Green allegedly directed her to go to El Paso—to kidnap a child. She was told to keep her eye out for children "on the street," because Green allegedly reasoned that children "shouldn't be on the street, so if we were to take them, we would be giving them a better life," says Gudino.

But as she tiptoed behind a young mother and her toddler near the Mexican border, about to fulfill a mission she believed had come directly from God, something snapped. "What am I doing?" Gudino asked herself. "It was like a light flashing in your face, waking you up from a dark place that you have allowed someone to push you into." Gudino left the only life she had known for two decades in 2004. "I didn't understand the evil that existed inside of [the Greens]," she says. "It wasn't easy for me to leave." Green and members have consistently denied Gudino's allegations.

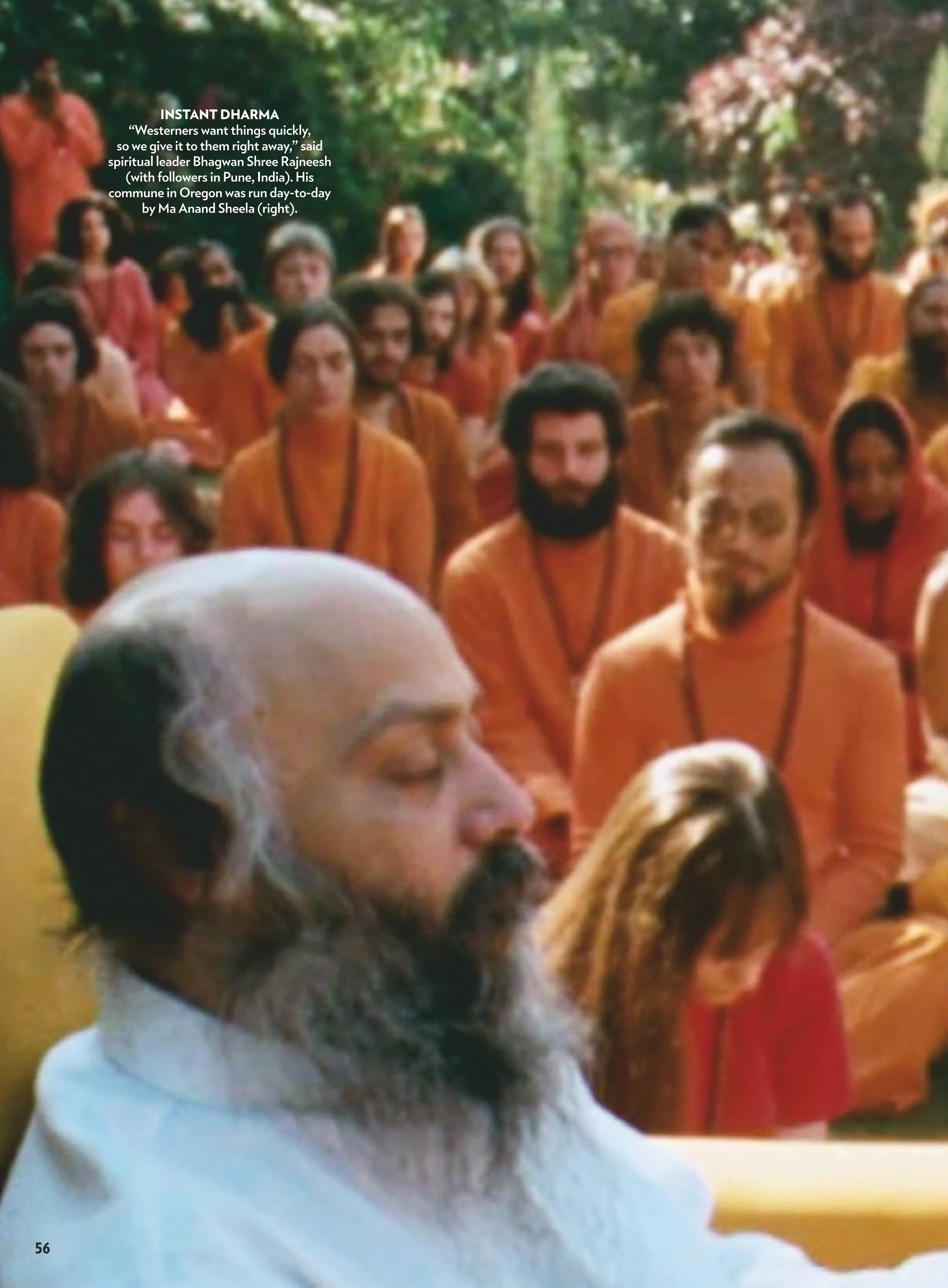


LIFESTYLE CULTS

SEX, MONEY AND POWER



BLISSED OUT
Followers of Indian spiritual leader Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh practice Dynamic Meditation at their commune near Antelope, Ore., in 1982. Free love and sexual self-expression were part of the guru's teachings.



INSTANT DHARMA
"Westerners want things quickly, so we give it to them right away," said spiritual leader Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh (with followers in Pune, India). His commune in Oregon was run day-to-day by Ma Anand Sheela (right).

RAJNEESH INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION

A GURU LANDS IN OREGON

Residents of tiny Antelope, Ore., were terrorized when an Indian teacher and his fiery follower used everything in their power—including poison and attempted murder—to take over their town

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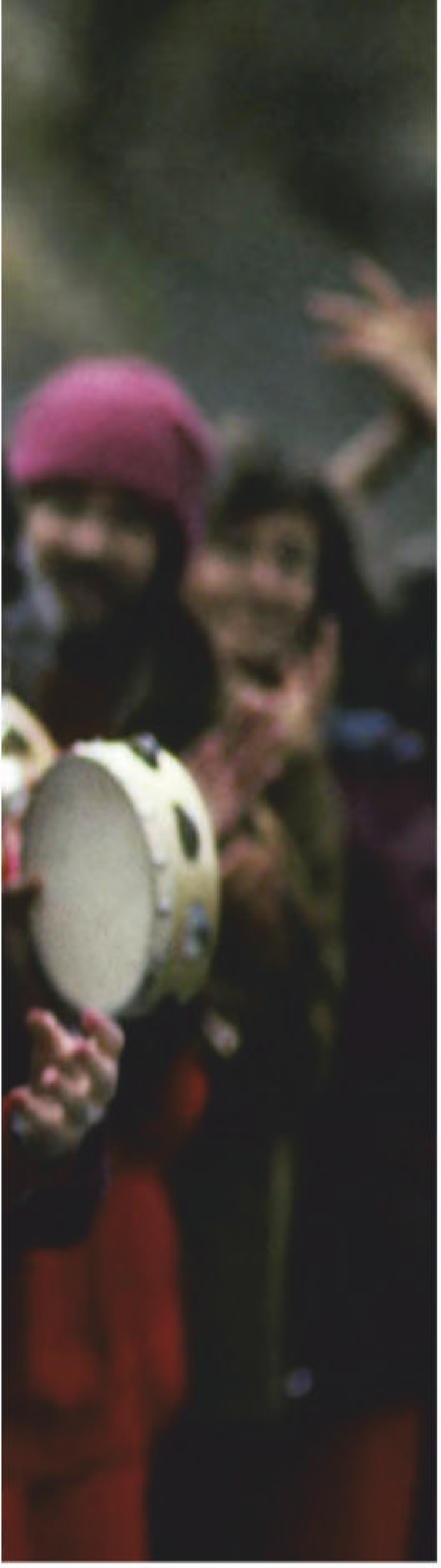
THE INDIAN GURU WHO called himself God ("Bhagwan" in Hindi) claimed that he could bestow spiritual bliss in the blink of an eye. As for the ecstatic group writhings in the nude and psychosexual encounters that his followers loudly practiced and that had earned him the nickname "the swami of sex," those were so much "abracadabra," he told *Time* magazine. "A single sound from me, or just a look," Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh said, "will bring that moment of enlightenment."

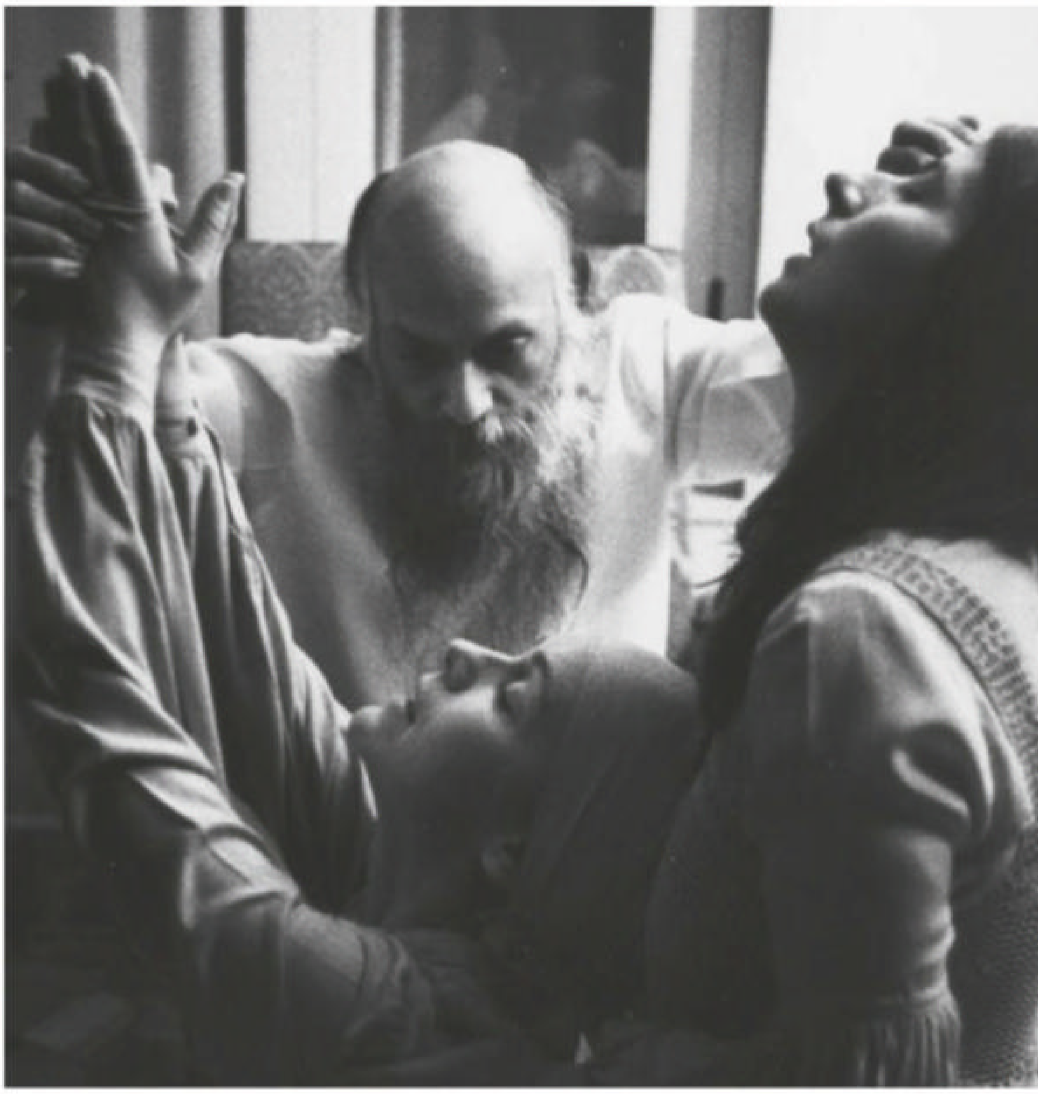
In hopes of many such divine moments with their master, thousands of followers, all wearing the orange-and-red garb of traditional Indian ascetics, flocked to Rancho Rajneesh, the vast tract outside Antelope, Ore. (pop. 40), where the free-love teacher moved his commune from India in 1981. "He was different from other gurus who told their followers to reject wealth and sex and desire and enjoyment of life," says Maclain Way, codirector with his brother Chapman of the hit Netflix documentary series about the cult *Wild Wild Country*. "Bhagwan's message was that you can be rich and enlightened at the same time."

In a daily ritual that encapsulated his commune's wild ride—and spectacular wipeout just four years later—the entire community turned out every afternoon to catch a glimpse of the bejeweled, Rolex-loving swami at the wheel of his Rolls-Royce, one from a fleet of 93 he owned. As he motored slowly past devotees gathered from around the world, "musicians would be playing drums and flutes, and all the adults would be smiling and crying," recalls Dickson Kent, who was 12 when his mother joined the Bhagwan's cult and brought him to Oregon from England. "I would look at him intently and will him to look in my eyes so that I could feel whatever it was that they were feeling, but he never did."

Once on public roads and out of contact

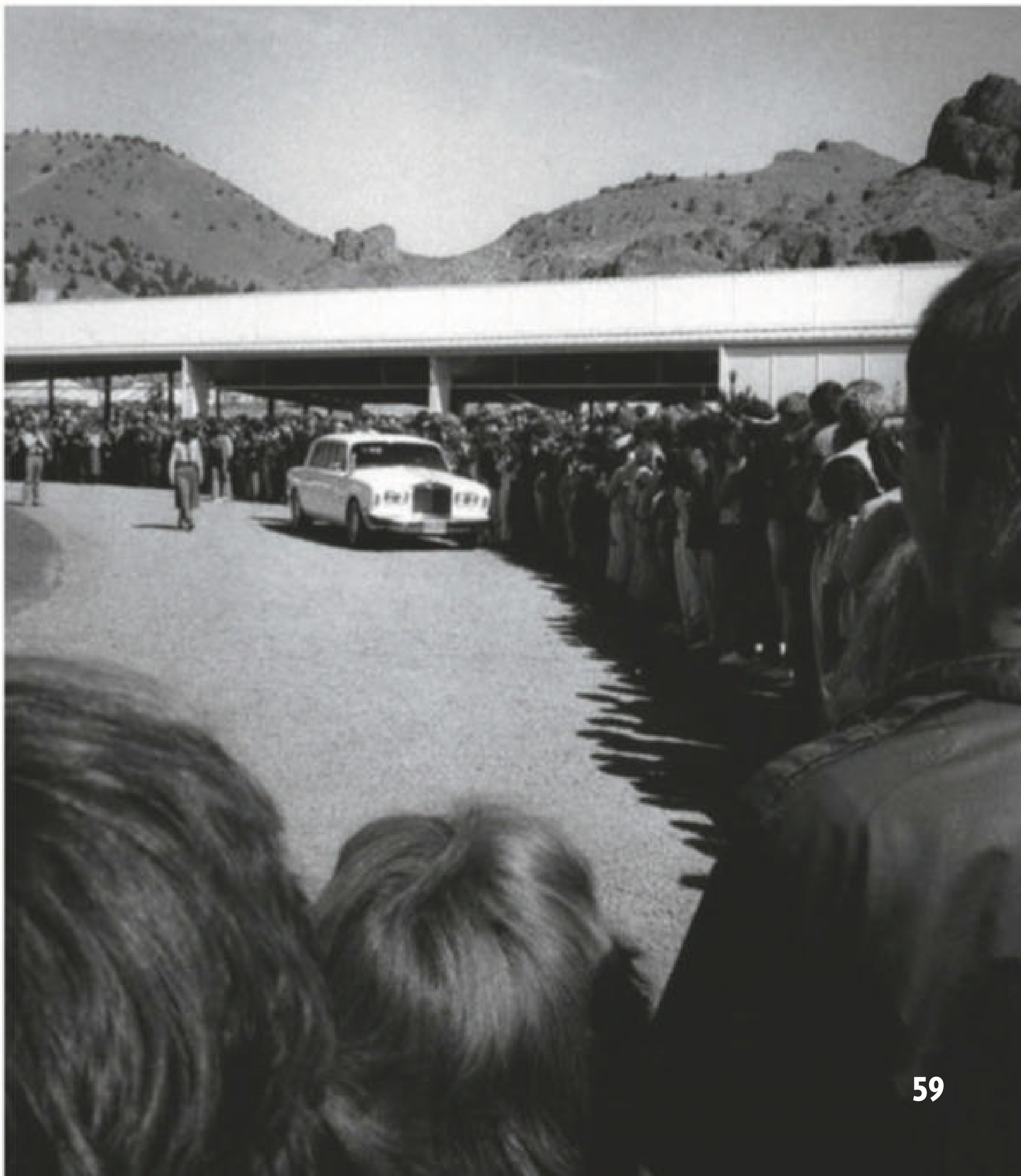


WARM WELCOME
"We thought they were a friendly bunch," Antelope's mayor said of a get-acquainted meeting hosted by Rajneesh followers at the group's commune. Lots of food, lots of free booze—it was a great party." Left: a celebration in 1985.



SPIRITUAL PLAIN
A teenager in India when she attended her first lecture by the Baghwan, Sheela (above right, with the guru) became his top aide in 1981 after helping to negotiate the purchase of Oregon's Big Muddy Ranch. Right: Rajneesh with disciples.

HOW HE ROLLS
"When the Bhagwan did his drive-by every afternoon, that was the big break in the work day," Dickson Kent said of the daily rite (bottom right).



with his followers, the Bhagwan put the pedal to the floor of his Rolls, so heavily plated with armor that tow truck drivers had fits bringing it in for repairs when the inevitable occurred. "His driving was (initially) so erratic that everyone was scared to death of him," the postmaster of Antelope told *People* in 1982. "He wrecked one Rolls in a creek. Then he hit a concrete truck."

That was the least of the damage inflicted by the self-anointed deity and his chief henchwoman, Ma Anand Sheela. Under her direction the cult took over Antelope, changed its name to Rajneeshpuram and drew up hit lists targeting unwelcoming residents for death. The Rajneeshees also launched a campaign to seize the county government that included plans to assassinate local officials by poison and bomb public buildings from aircraft. The enthusiastically confrontational Sheela frequently appeared on national TV, accusing the guru's critics of religious persecution. In a bizarre election-fixing

NEW BEGINNING
The cult's 64,000-acre former ranch in central Oregon is now a resortlike Young Life Christian youth camp.

plot she masterminded, thousands of homeless men from cities across the country were imported by bus in order to register them to vote for county offices in 1984. When an elections board refused to register them, the importees were unceremoniously made homeless again, dumped on the streets of Portland, Ore., and other cities.

Not to be deterred, Sheela then oversaw an even more heartless, potentially homicidal scheme in which, days before the polling, more than 700 Oregonians were poisoned by salmonella brewed in the commune's secret biochemical-warfare laboratory and left in the salad bars of local restaurants. It still ranks as the largest bioterror attack in the United States.

By the time Sheela split with the guru and fled the commune in 1985, she had established a spy apparatus that included secret chambers and an escape tunnel from her own compound. She electronically bugged the entire commune, including the living quarters of the Bhagwan himself. She also orchestrated the attempted murder of the Bhagwan's personal physician, persuading Jane Stork, a mild-mannered Australian homemaker and mother of two, to stab the man in the buttocks with an adrenaline-filled syringe. The attempt failed. "I tried to physically kill somebody," a deeply remorseful Stork, who served three years in prison for the crime, told *People*. "I came [to Rancho Rajneesh] for support, love and laughter, but the whole atmosphere changed."

The Baghwan and his followers had come to Oregon, said Chapman Way, with "sky-high intentions to transform the consciousness of the planet." But the utopian dream turned into paranoid delusion, and the commune into an armed camp. The guru initially cooperated with investigators, but his followers threatened to defend him to the death, so local, state and federal agents prepared for a bloody raid. The potentially violent confrontation ended when the Bhagwan fled the commune in October 1985 via Learjet. He later pleaded guilty to immigration charges and agreed to leave the U.S. He died in India in 1990.

"To me the ranch was just this small microcosm of the world at large," ex-cult member Dickson Kent told *People*. "We had abuses of power, abuses of sex, and at the same time we had great creativity and fun and laughter and joy. But I don't think the good outweighed the bad—if it did, it all wouldn't have gone down in flames."

LAVISH TASTES
Rolex watches and more than 90 Rolls-Royces were among the luxuries collected by the guru.

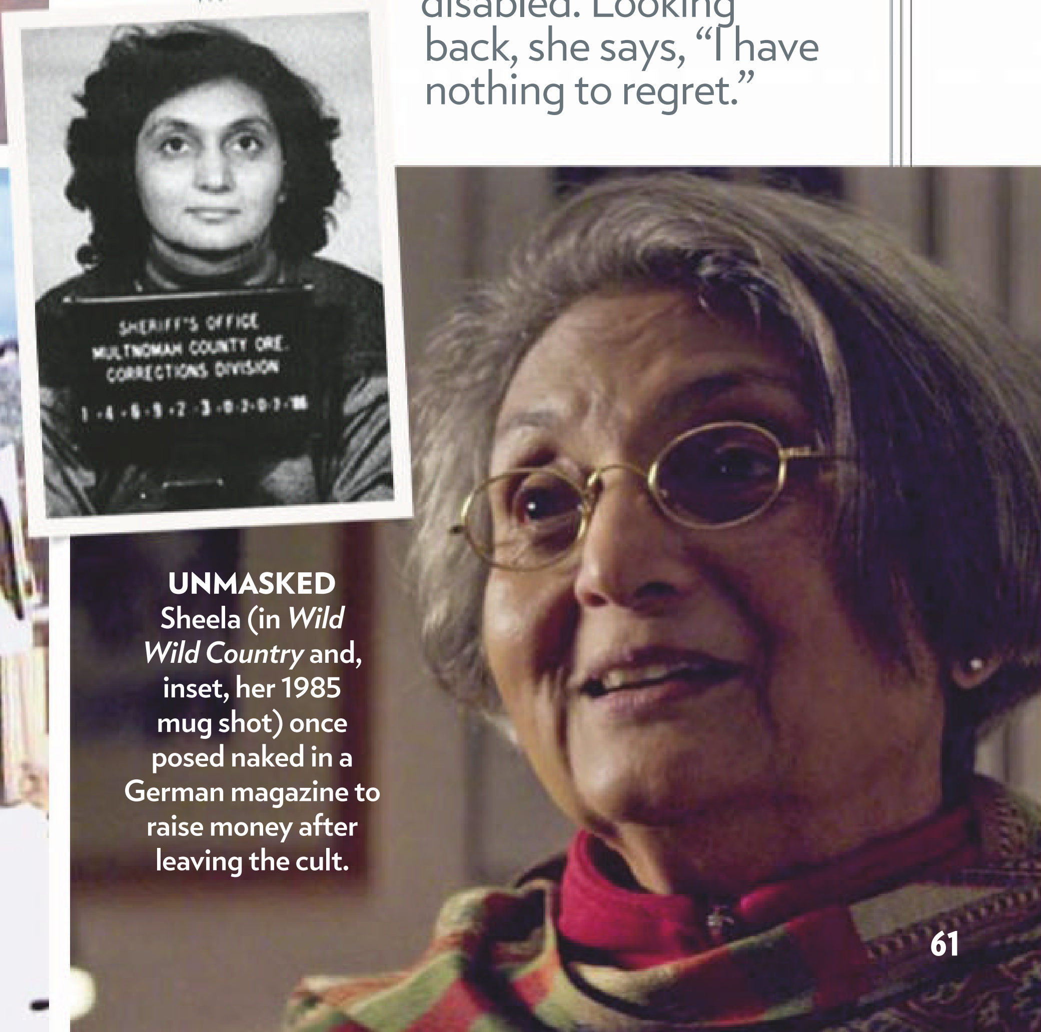
MARATHON PERP WALK
Federal agents who arrested Rajneesh at an airport in North Carolina in 1985 took a full 12 days to deliver him to his arraignment in Portland, Ore., ferrying him from city to city in a disorienting cross-country tour. Citizens of Antelope (below) celebrated the return of normal life in 1985.

CITY OF
"...ANTELOPE HOSTAGES..."
FREE AT LAST!

AFTER THE CULT'S FALL

MASTERMIND MA ANAND SHEELA FEELS NO SHAME

"It was a beautiful life I have lived," said Ma Anand Sheela via video last May during a panel discussion with producers of *Wild Wild Country*, the Netflix series that made her an unlikely star. She was speaking from her home in Switzerland, where a photo of her guru, Baghwan Shree Rajneesh—who called her a "Judas" and accused her of attempted murder and possible embezzlement after she fled the Oregon commune in 1985—hangs in her bedroom. Now 68, Sheela was extradited to the U.S. from Germany, where she initially took refuge, and pleaded guilty to assault, wiretapping and other charges. After serving 29 months of a 20-year sentence, she settled in Switzerland, where she runs nursing homes for the mentally disabled. Looking back, she says, "I have nothing to regret."

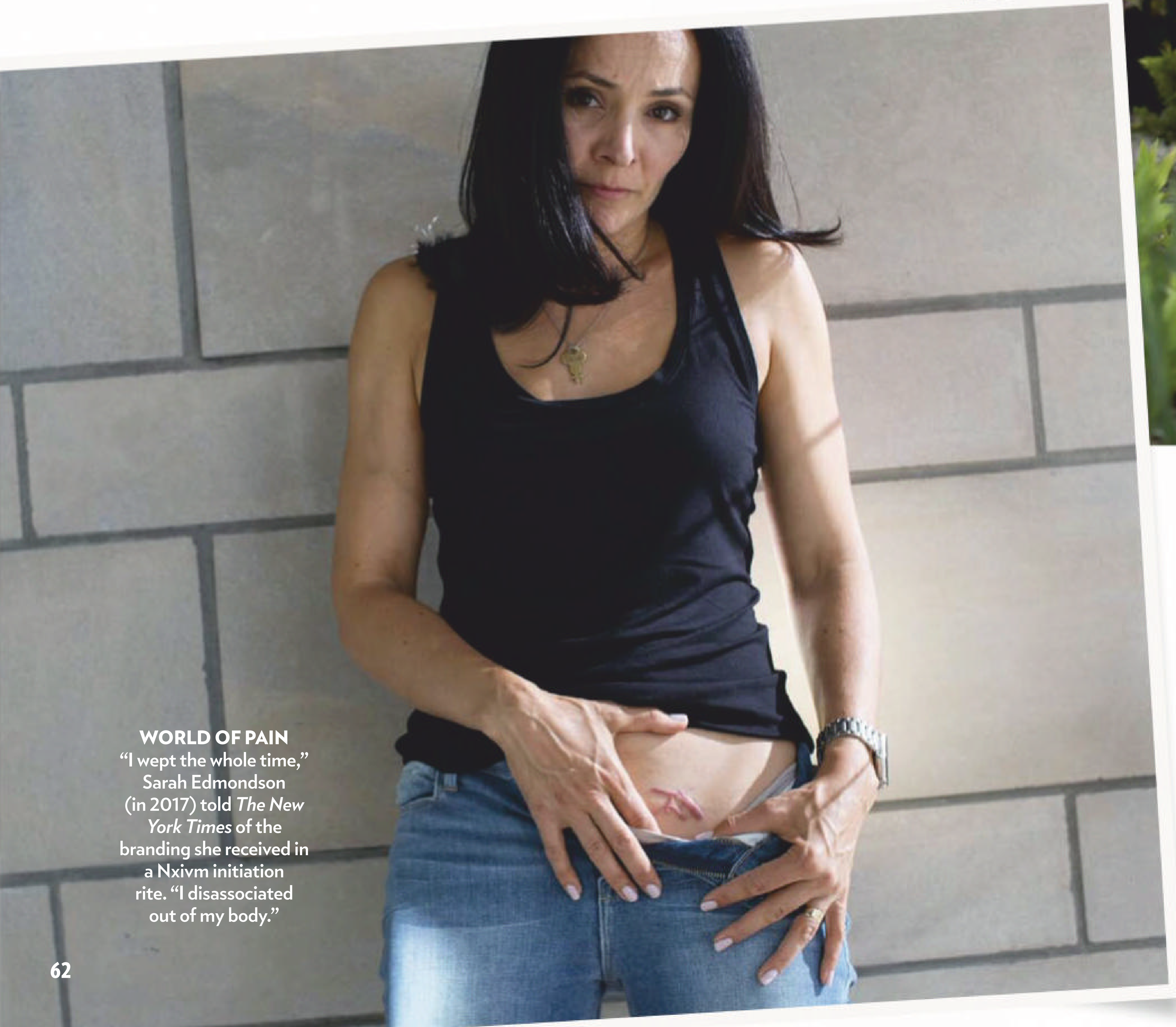


UNMASKED
Sheela (in *Wild Wild Country* and, inset, her 1985 mug shot) once posed naked in a German magazine to raise money after leaving the cult.

NXIVM'S INNER CIRCLE

SECRET SORORITY

Cult or self-help group? An organization dedicated to women's empowerment lured the rich and famous into alleged sex slavery



WORLD OF PAIN
"I wept the whole time," Sarah Edmondson (in 2017) told *The New York Times* of the branding she received in a Nxivm initiation rite. "I disassociated out of my body."

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KARNER
WOODS
NXIVM
Executive
Success
Programs

COSTLY HEALING
The organization (headquartered in Albany, N.Y.) offered courses called "human pain" designed to help clients understand the supposed role of pain in love. They cost up to $5,000 a month.

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IN A SCENE THAT SEEMED right out of a horror film, the women were led, naked and blindfolded, to a candlelit ceremony. Then, as they lay prone and restrained on a raised table, each of them spoke as directed: "Master, please brand me. It would be an honor."

The room filled with the stench of burning flesh as a symbol was seared into the skin above each woman's hip. But this was no matinee creep show. The women allegedly were being initiated as slaves into a secret society within the group Nxivm (pronounced NEX-e-um), which claimed, astonishingly, to be dedicated to female empowerment. The group's cofounder, Keith Raniere, 58, known as Vanguard to his followers, promised to help members overcome a mind-set that, he said, caused women to allow themselves to be victimized. Initially positioned as an executive coaching firm, the Albany, N.Y.-based organization (with chapters in San Francisco, Vancouver and Mexico) has since 1998 charged roughly 16,000 people as much as $3,400 for workshops that promised a journey of personal discovery and development. Among those drawn in was actress Allison Mack, 36, who became a high-ranking member of Nxivm even as she was starring as Clark Kent's best friend on TV's *Smallville.* She

DOUBLE-TALK Keith Raniere (left, in 1995) claimed in a bio posted on Nxivm's website that he was already speaking in full sentences before he was a year old. He faces charges that could send him to prison for life.

SISTERHOOD *Smallville* actor Allison Mack (with her lawyer Sean Buckley in May) told a reporter that it was she who suggested branding rather than an alternative test of members' commitment. "I was, like, 'Y'all, a tattoo?'"

explained the branding ceremony to *The New York Times* as a testament to the women's "full-time commitment to become our most powerful and embodied selves by pushing our greatest fears [and] by overcoming pain."

Others did not share her view. "It was the most painful, traumatic moment of my life," former Nxivm adherent Sarah Edmondson, 41, told *People* of the 2016 initiation ceremony. Edmondson, a Canadian actress, had attended expecting to be tattooed. Instead she was permanently marked by the 2-in.-square brand with Raniere's initials incorporated in its design. But the branding was merely a painful symbol of something yet darker: The 150 or so women in Nxivm's "secret sorority," known either as "the Vow" or "DOS," were allegedly forced to maintain near-starvation diets and to serve Raniere's sexual desires.

Edmondson quit the group soon after and, with another former member, went to authorities. After a yearlong FBI investigation, Raniere and five other members of Nxivm's leadership face charges that include sex trafficking, conspiracy to commit forced labor, racketeering and money laundering. Among those charged was Mack, who, according to New York State and federal prosecutors, used blackmail to force women to have sex with Raniere. Other members of Nxivm's hierarchy, including Seagram's heir Clare Bronfman, have been charged with identity theft and "a broad range of serious crimes" designed, prosecutors said, "to promote and protect Raniere and Nxivm."

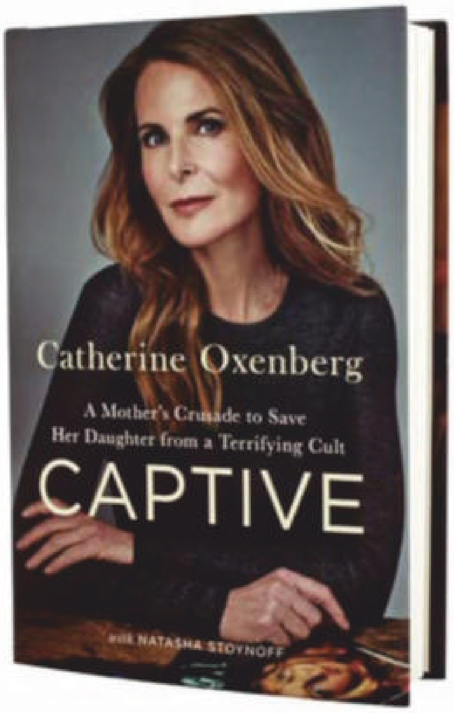
All six have pleaded not guilty, and all except Raniere, who has remained in jail since his arrest in March, are free on bond, awaiting trial expected to begin in early 2019. Raniere's lawyer Marc Agnifilo told *Dateline's* Megyn Kelly in August that allegations that women served as Raniere's sex slaves were "nonsense." He also stated that Nxivm, which ceased operations in May 2018, did not operate as a cult, as former members have alleged, and that people joined the overall group, as well as the sorority subgroup, of their own volition. One such member was India Oxenberg, daughter of former *Dynasty* star Catherine Oxenberg. Then 19, India attended her first Nxivm event in Los Angeles in 2011 with her mom. "I found it weird and creepy," the actress told *People*. But India stuck with it, eventually moving to the Albany headquarters. Six years later Oxenberg learned that India was among Raniere's branded women. "It was horror and disbelief," said Oxenberg, who then worked with the FBI and state authorities to rescue her daughter and others. (See box.)

"This is a group that preys on people," Steven Hassan, author of *Combatting Cult Mind Control* and founder of the Freedom of Mind Resource Center, told *People*. "They get them in, they indoctrinate them, and then they send them out to recruit more people, kind of like cancer cells."

"THE VICTIMS WERE THEN EXPLOITED, BOTH SEXUALLY AND FOR THEIR LABOR, TO THE DEFENDANTS' BENEFIT"
—RICHARD P. DONOGHUE, U.S. ATTORNEY

COURT THERAPY
Nxivm president Nancy Salzman was a practicing therapist when she met Raniere and helped him launch the organization. She faces charges of identity-theft conspiracy and of altering records for use in an official proceeding.

BRAND NAME
Seagram's whiskey heiresses Clare (right) and Sara Bronfman (left, with Nxivm member Pam Cafritz in 2009) reportedly gave millions of the family fortune to Nxivm enterprises. Only Clare faces criminal charges.

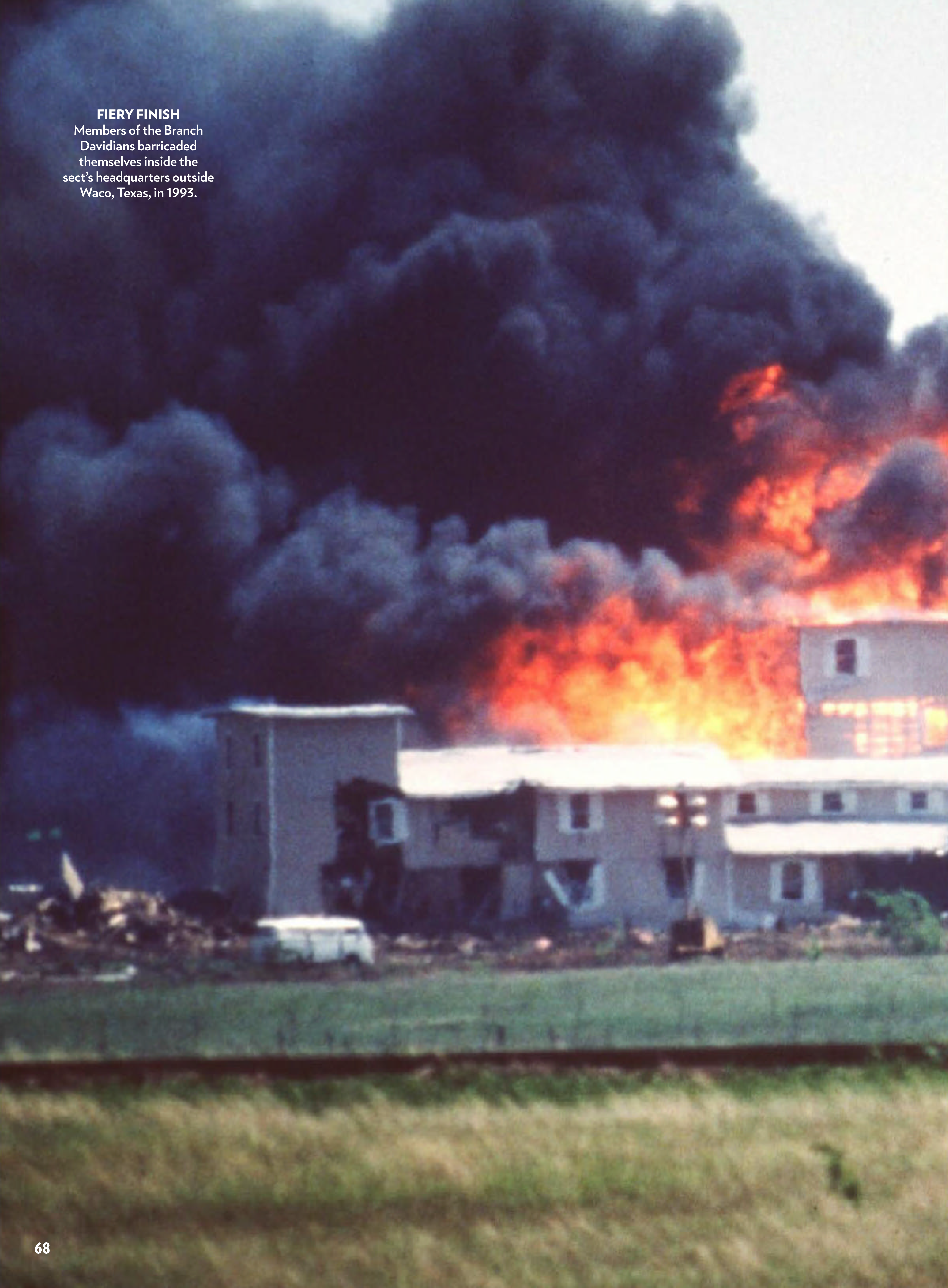

Catherine Oxenberg
A Mother's Crusade to Save Her Daughter from a Terrifying Cult
CAPTIVE
with NATASHA STOYNOFF

‘HOW I SAVED MY DAUGHTER’

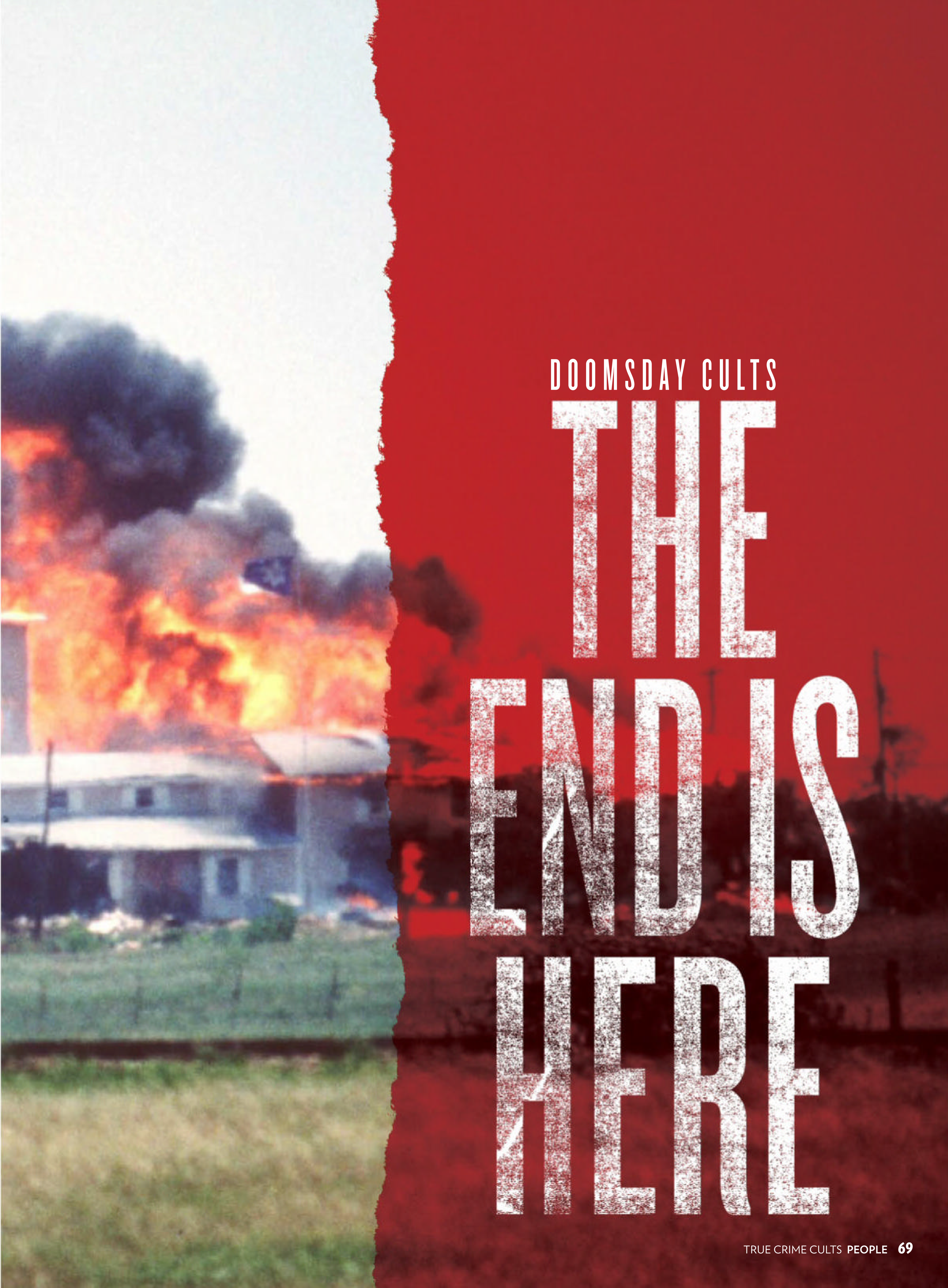
ACTRESS CATHERINE OXENBERG HELPED BRING DOWN NXIVM

“India, have you been branded?” It was a moment Catherine Oxenberg never could have imagined six years before, in 2011, when her daughter, then 19, attended her first Nxivm training event, hoping to pick up tips for running her food-truck-bakery business. “This is for me,” she told her mom at the time. In the years that followed, Oxenberg, who tells the story in her memoir *Captive: A Mother’s Crusade to Save Her Daughter from a Terrifying Cult*, cowritten by former *People* writer Natasha Stoynoff, grew increasingly concerned as she watched her daughter spend the bulk of her six-figure inheritance on classes and eventually move from L.A. to the group’s headquarters in Albany, N.Y. Concern turned to alarm when India’s friend Bonnie Piesse, who fled Nxivm in 2017, warned that India was in danger. “You need to save your daughter,” Piesse said. Oxenberg confronted India, who shocked her mother by calling the branding “character building.” By November Oxenberg was meeting with New York State investigators and the FBI, armed with a 300-page binder detailing a range of alleged crimes committed by Raniere and Nxivm officials. When news came in March of Raniere’s arrest, Oxenberg’s elation was tempered when she learned that prosecutors named India, now home with her family, as a “coconspirator.” Hopeful that her daughter will not face charges, Oxenberg said that India’s case proves that if a “sane, levelheaded, beautiful” person like her can fall into the clutches of a cult, “it can happen to anyone.”

REUNITED
Oxenberg (with India in 2011) first took her daughter to a Nxivm meeting as a “bonding” experience. “She’s moving forward,” she says today.

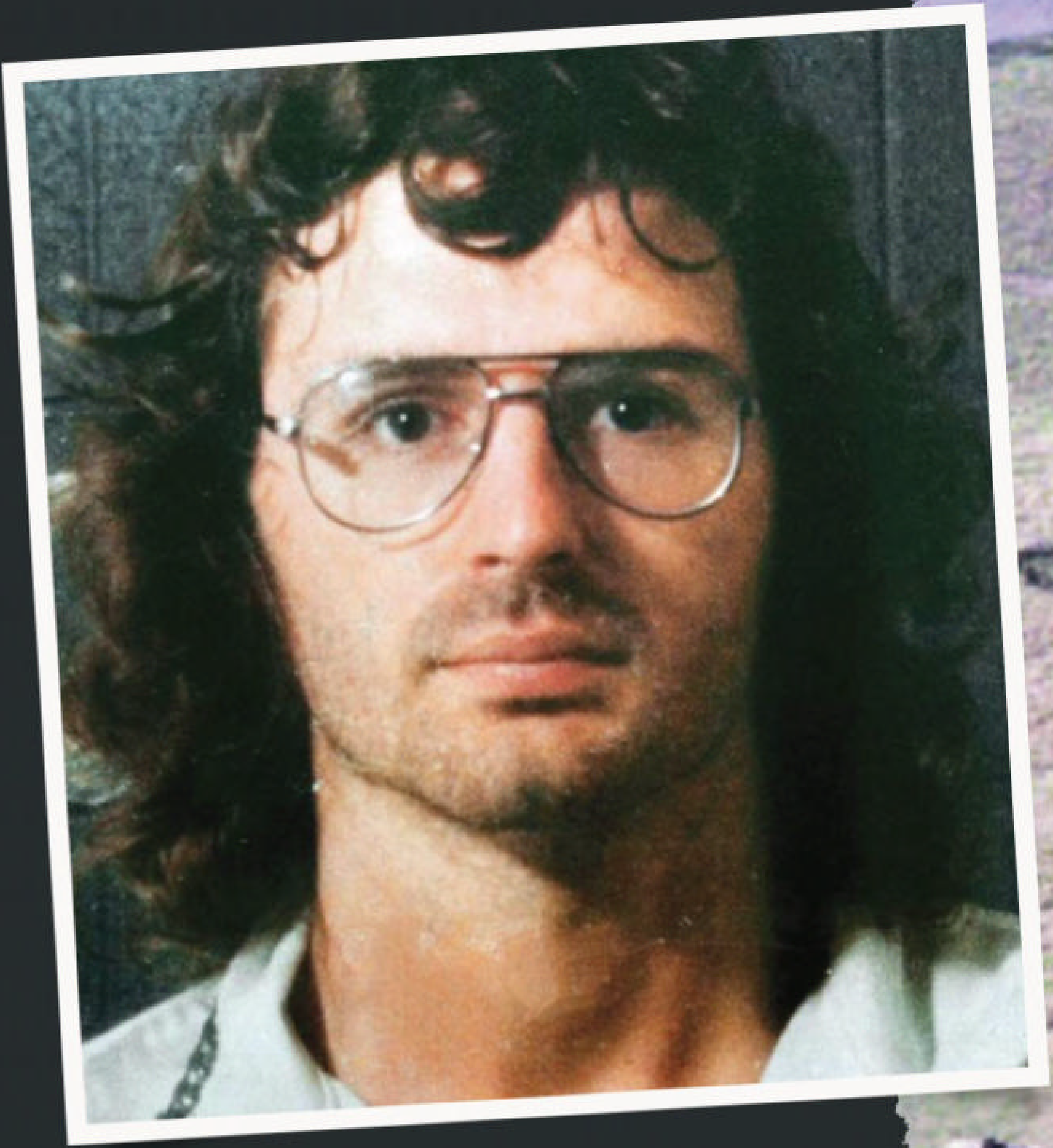


FIERY FINISH
Members of the Branch Davidians barricaded themselves inside the sect's headquarters outside Waco, Texas, in 1993.



DOOMSDAY CULTS

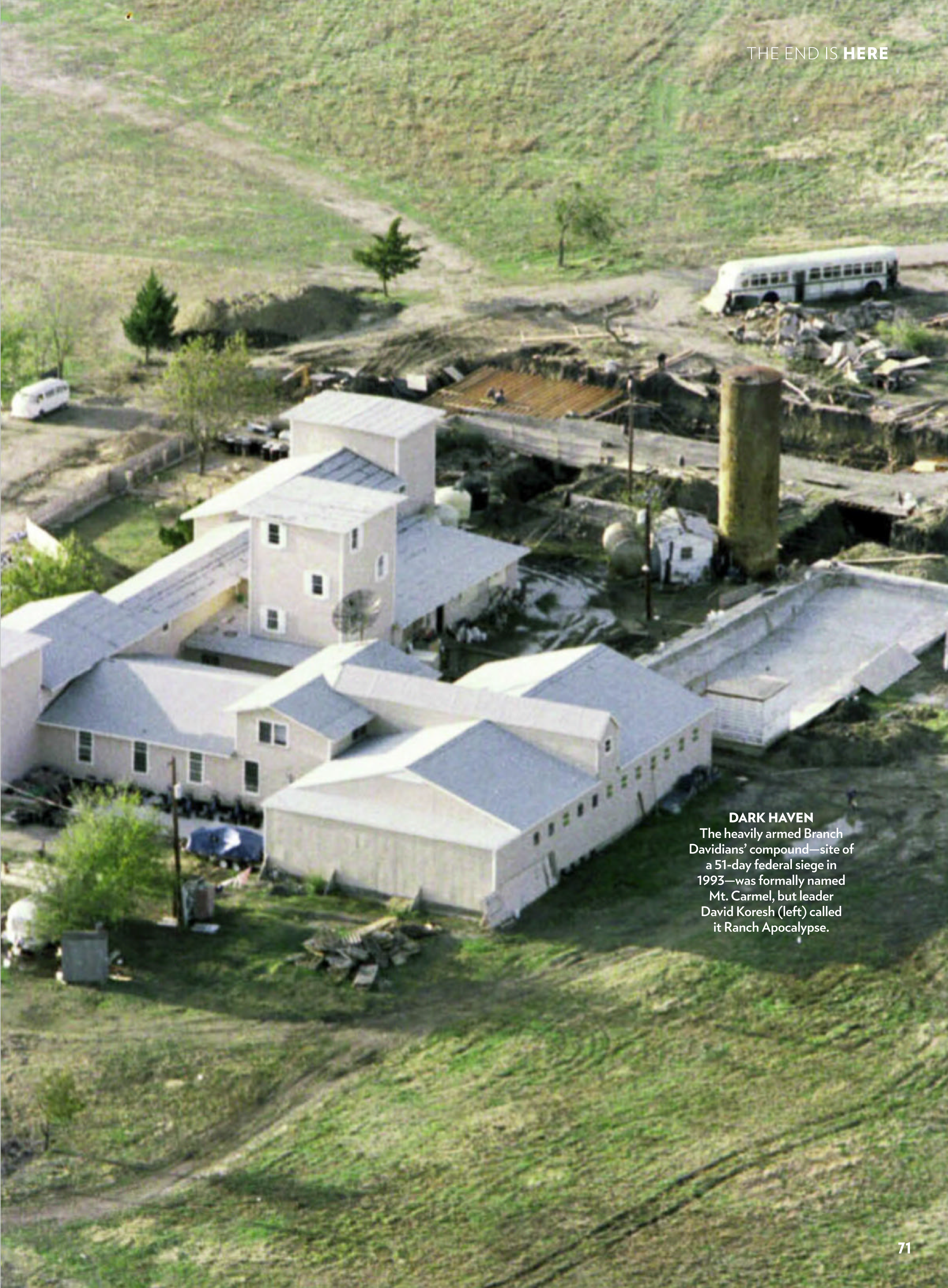
THE END IS HERE



BRANCH DAVIDIANS

THE SIEGE IN WACO

An FBI raid on the Texas compound where 'prophet' David Koresh allegedly abused children went fatally wrong



DARK HAVEN
The heavily armed Branch Davidians' compound—site of a 51-day federal siege in 1993—was formally named Mt. Carmel, but leader David Koresh (left) called it Ranch Apocalypse.

A

“AND THEY CAME UP ON the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp. . . . But fire came down from heaven and devoured them.” As it was written in the Book of Revelation, so it happened—outside a Texas town of approximately 100,000. “The skin was peeling off my hands, my jacket was melting,” survivor Clive Doyle recalled to *People,* 25 years after he and only eight other followers of David Koresh, the messianic leader of the Branch Davidian Christian doomsday sect, escaped the inferno that engulfed the group’s compound on the broad windswept prairie near Waco, Texas.

For the 75 members of the cult, including 25 children, who died in the horrific fires that erupted during a military-style assault by federal law enforcement, April 19, 1993, proved to be the Judgment Day that Koresh, the self-proclaimed Lamb and Son of God, who also died in the conflagration, had long promised. Unlike the apocalypse prophesied in Revelation, the one in Waco was televised worldwide.

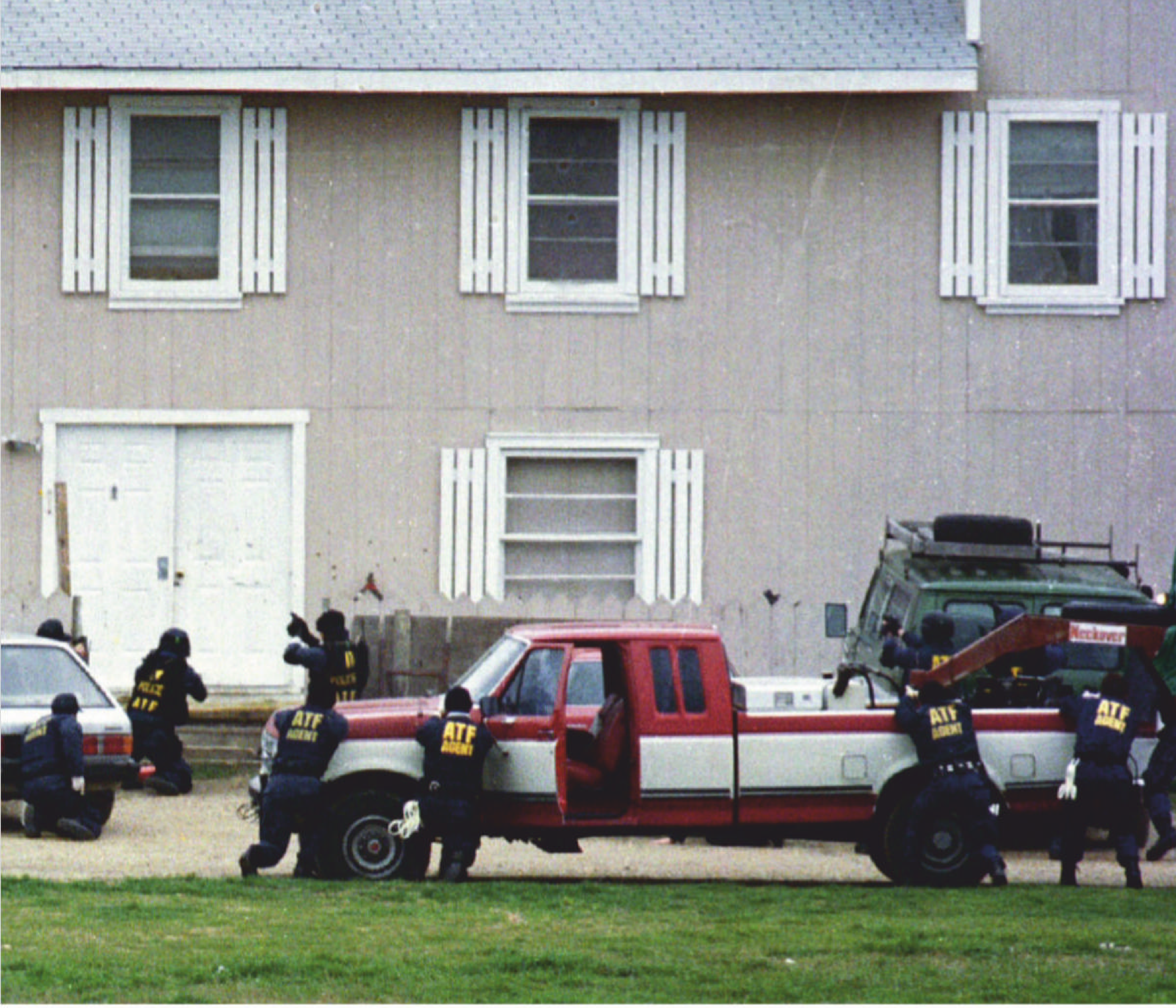
The fire ended a 51-day siege that began Sunday, Feb. 28, following a fierce and bloody two-hour shoot-out between sect members and agents from the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. At the end of the gun battle, four ATF agents and five of Koresh’s followers were dead, and the leader himself was among the wounded.

In the ensuing standoff, more than 700 FBI and other law enforcement agents, backed by tanks and other armored vehicles, surrounded the compound, demanding that Koresh lead his followers to safety—and immediate arrest. It was not to be. “They are all prepared to die for him,” ex-Davidian Marc Breault told *People* during the siege.

The ATF agents had come to serve search-and-arrest warrants following a nearly yearlong investigation, prompted in part by Breault, that brought allegations that the sect was stockpiling illegal weapons (which it was) as well as engaging in child abuse, and that Koresh had fathered children with girls as young as 12.

Born Vernon Howell in Houston, Koresh, a Christian-rock bandleader turned preacher who “made the Scriptures come alive,” as Clive Doyle said, took over the Branch Davidians, an offshoot of the Seventh Day Adventist Church, in the mid-1980s. A fight with a leadership rival led to a shoot-out and 1987 attempted murder charges against Koresh, who was acquitted.

During a 1985 visit to Israel, Koresh had a vision, he told followers, while standing atop Mount Zion. There, he said, angels whisked him “up past Orion, to meet God,” David Thibodeau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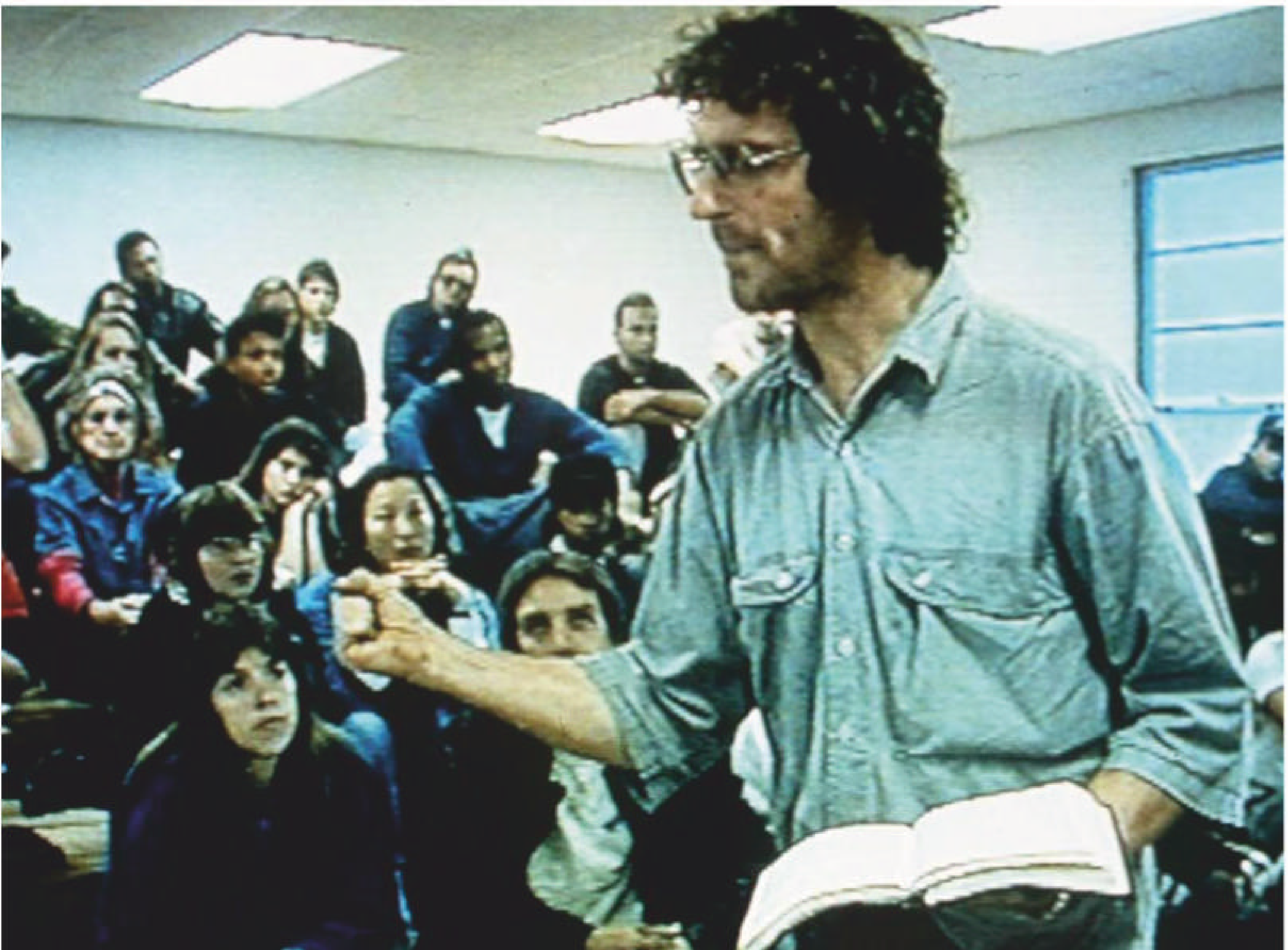


SURROUNDED
Four federal agents died and 16 were wounded during the initial ATF raid to arrest Koresh and search the Mt. Carmel compound for illegal weapons.

PREACHING GOSPEL
"If the Bible is true, then I'm Christ," Koresh (in 1992) said in a taped message broadcast during the siege. But not all were believers. "I still don't know what his message is," said the grandmother of a dead follower. "It was like a handful of bubbles."

AFTER THE INFERNO
"No matter what you think of David Koresh"—or the 75 people who died with him—"they died for what they believed in," said siege survivor David Thibodeau in 2018.

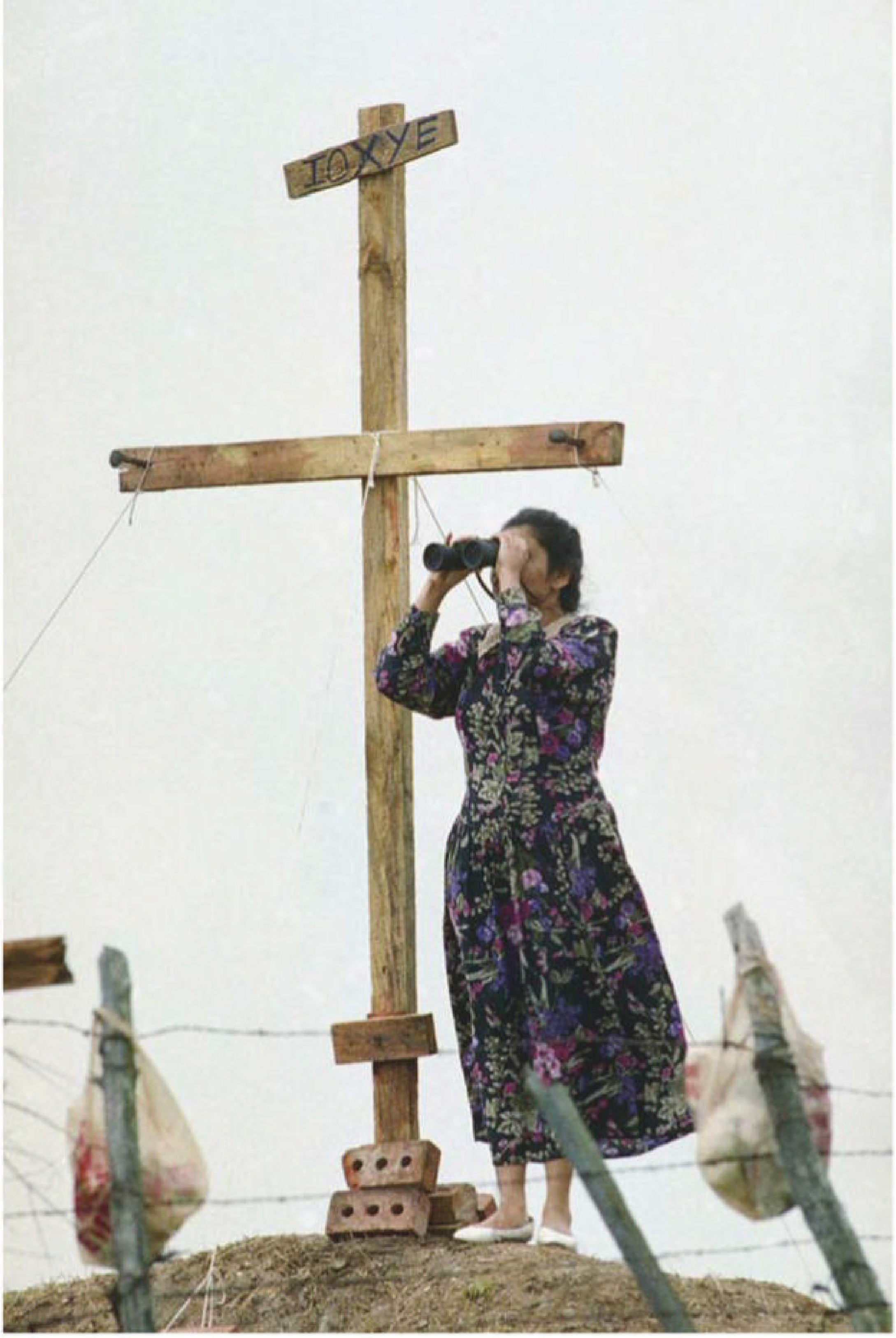
recounted in his 1999 memoir *Waco: A Survivor's Story*. (The book, as well as *Stalling for Time,* by former FBI negotiator Gary Noesner, was a primary source of the Paramount Network's 2018 six-part series *Waco,* starring Rory Culkin as Thibodeau and Michael Shannon as Noesner.)

Upon his return to Waco, Koresh announced that the world would end in 1995. He told his followers that God had instructed him to have a child with his legal wife's 11-year-old sister, Thibodeau wrote. She was one of more than a dozen female followers he took as his "wives," among them underage girls and the wives and lovers of other male sect members whom Koresh ordered to practice celibacy.

"He taught that all women in the world belonged to him, that those of us who were married had to give up our wives to him, and that only he had the right to procreate," Breault, a former chief Koresh lieutenant turned fierce critic, told *People* in 1993. "He became fixated with sex and with a taste for younger girls."

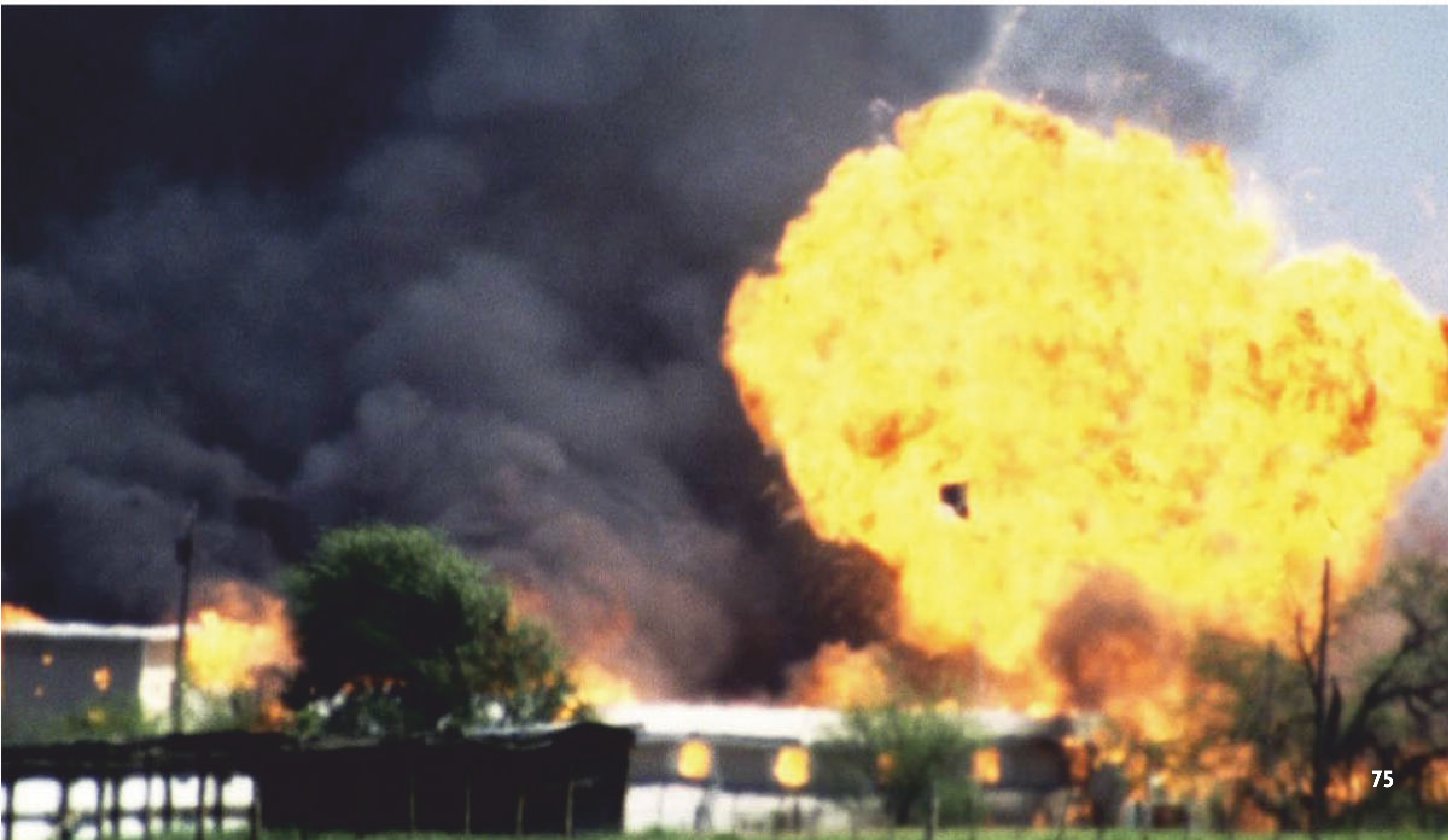
By the eve of the sect's destruction, "David had had sexual relations with a total of 15 women," Thibodeau wrote, "and had fathered 17 children with 11 of them." Eight of the women and 12 of the children would perish in the doomsday that Koresh, who refused to surrender to face possible statutory rape charges that could have resulted in his spending the rest of his life in prison, seemed to welcome. "If we die here," Koresh said, according to Thibodeau,"it's because our purpose in this life has been served."

Today, a quarter century later, Charles J. Pace, who says he was a Davidian (but living in Alabama at the time of the siege), has taken over the sect's Mt. Carmel property and is seeking new converts. "It could be 20, it could be 20,000. I don't know, and I don't really care," Pace told *People* this year. "That's up to the Holy Spirit." He intends to build a museum, but, he adds ominously, "I will let people move on the property if they want to build Mt. Carmel up to be a bastion of truth. Biblical, political, spiritual truth."



EYES ON WACO
A Branch Davidian supporter erected a wooden cross with the Greek word for fish, a symbol used by early Christians, near the sect's compound (left).

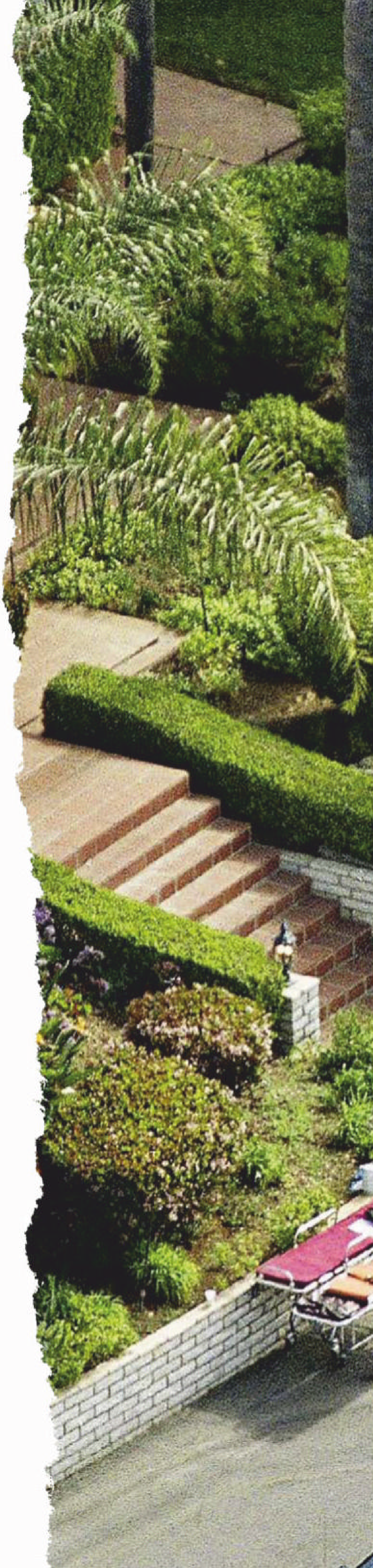
BALL OF FIRE
Seen live on TV news, the final showdown on the Texas prairie resembled "a gigantic funeral pyre," said one witness. The cause of the lethal blaze is disputed to this day.



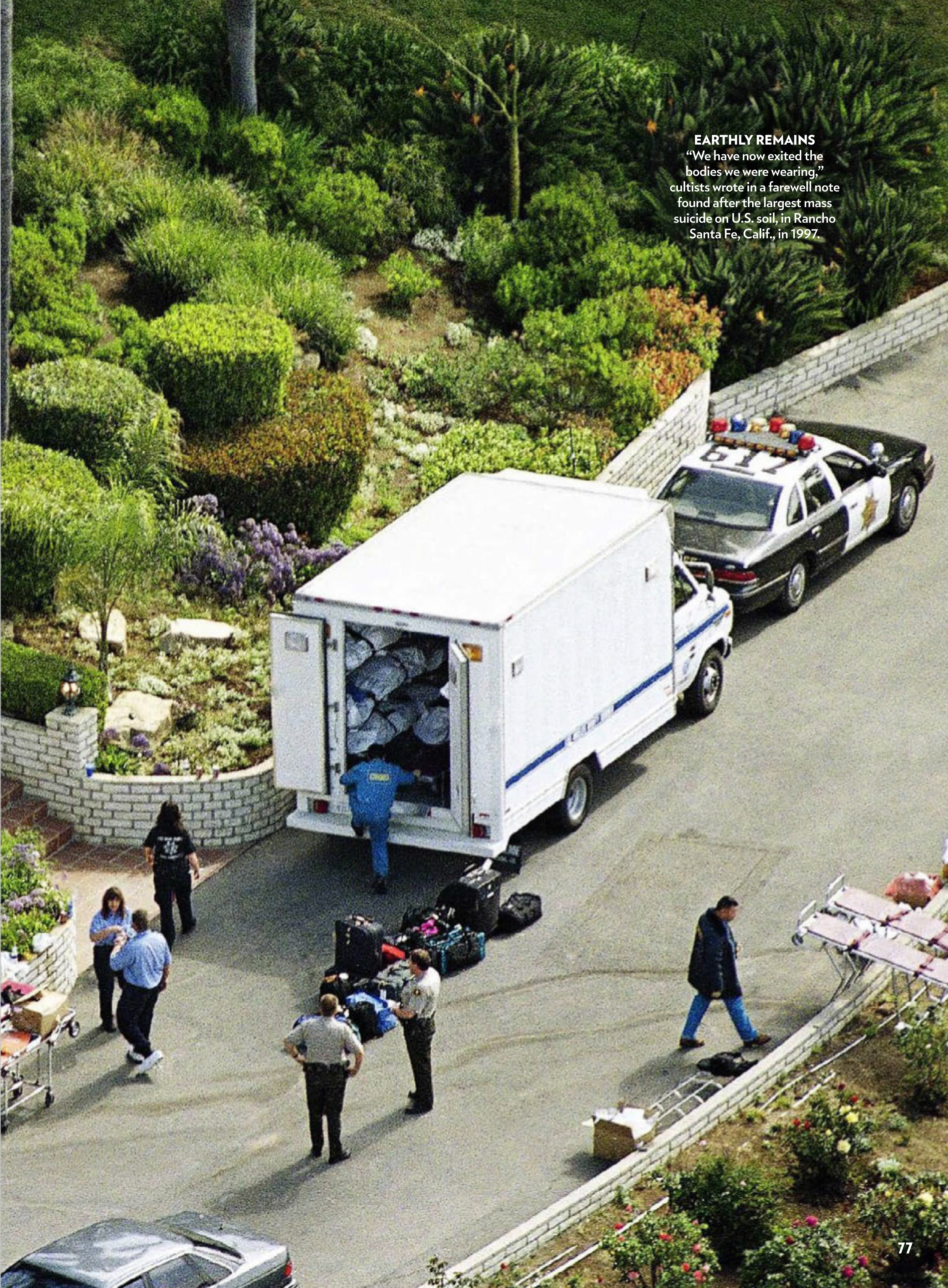
HEAVEN'S GATE

CALIFORNIA MADMAN

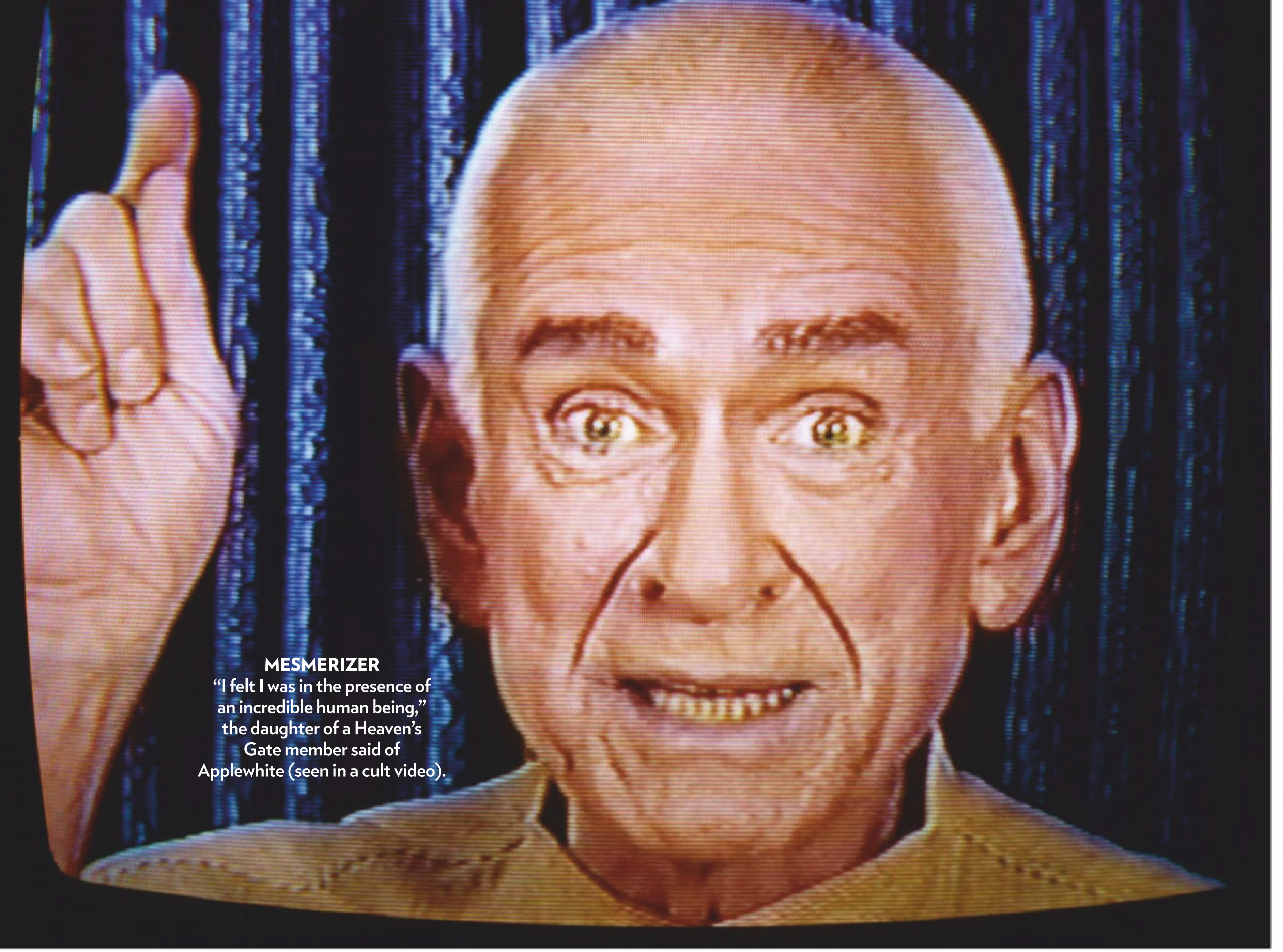
When mystic Marshall Applewhite saw an omen in the sky, 38 of his devoted followers took their own lives to fly away to outer space



A RUGGEDLY HANDSOME OUTDOORSMAN and Korean War vet, John "Mickey" Craig was as down-to-earth as anyone who stands 6′6″ can be. He walked tall in Durango, Colo., where he was often seen wearing his signature cowboy boots and Stetson hat. The look got him cast in a prominent horseback ride-on part when scenes of the 1969 Oscar winner *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* were shot in Durango. Craig was also a real estate developer and a prominent local Republican. And so Mary Ann, his high school sweetheart, his wife of 21 years and the mother of their six children, paid no mind when, in the summer of 1975, an eccentric former fraternity brother of her husband's came for a visit and talked into the night about his recent immersion in a UFO cult. She was in for the shock of her life when, a week after his friend's visit, Craig disappeared and she was never to see or speak with him again. "This was a real switcheroo," Mary Ann, who was left



EARTHLY REMAINS
"We have now exited the bodies we were wearing," cultists wrote in a farewell note found after the largest mass suicide on U.S. soil, in Rancho Santa Fe, Calif., in 1997.



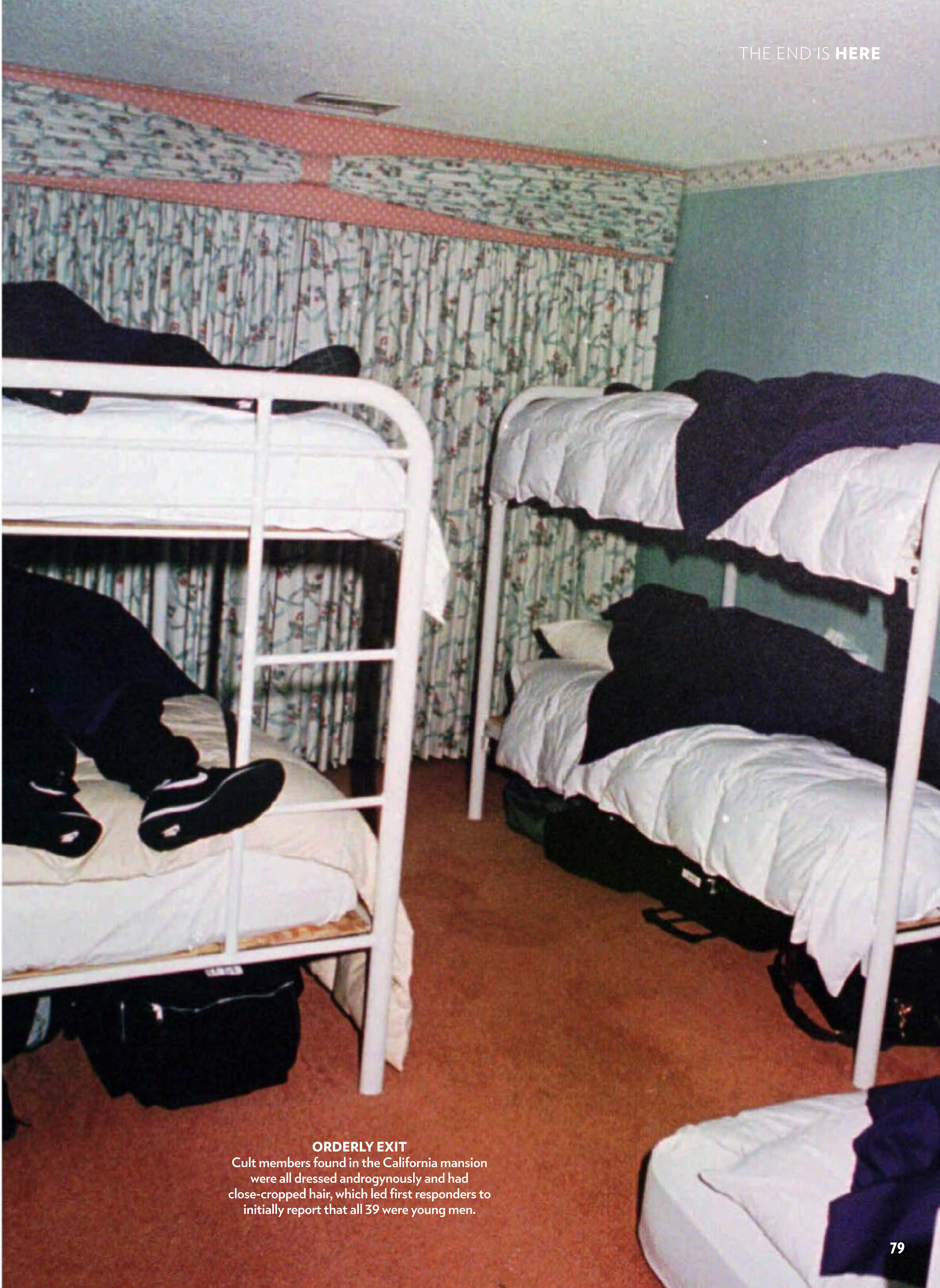
MESMERIZER
"I felt I was in the presence of an incredible human being," the daughter of a Heaven's Gate member said of Applewhite (seen in a cult video).

to raise six kids, ages 8 to 18, on her own, told *People* 22 years later. "I'm the one who likes to read Stephen King."

Even that master of the eerie and bizarre might have been hard-pressed to conjure the scene that San Diego sheriff's deputies discovered on the afternoon of March 26, 1997, when responding to an anonymous 911 call about a mass suicide at a mansion in wealthy Rancho Sante Fe. Inside were the decomposing bodies of 39 members of the Heaven's Gate doomsday cult. Looking like hibernating astronauts in a deep-space sci-fi flick, they were dressed uniformly in black tunics and brand-new Nikes. In their pockets were a $5 bill, a roll of coins and a tube of lip balm, preparations for ascension to heaven aboard a UFO said to be following in the wake of the comet Hale-Bopp. The currency was required, said a sympathetic former cult member, because once aboard the spacecraft, "moving from one star system to another [they] would have to live within their budget."

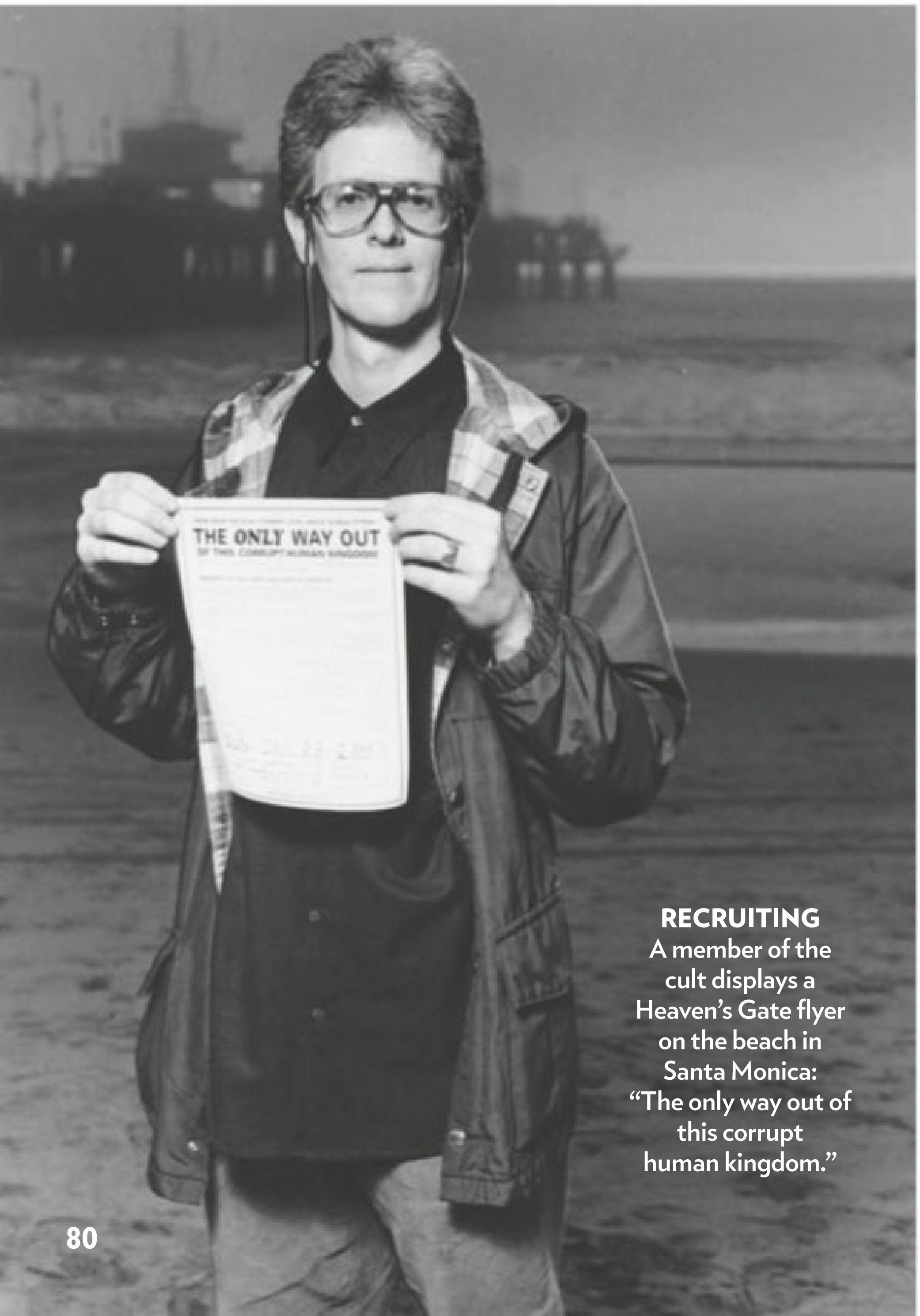
A novelist would be further challenged to make believable the group's wild-eyed leader, Marshall Herff Applewhite, a 65-year-old Texan who claimed to be an extraterrestrial from the "Kingdom Level Above Human." He had persuaded followers to commit suicide—or, in cult parlance, shed their "human containers"—in order to ascend to paradise on another planet. Among the willing were men and women from all walks of life who had left their homes and careers and had renounced drugs, alcohol and sex—half a dozen of the men, including Applewhite, had voluntarily submitted to surgical castration—to follow the former choirmaster and music teacher.

The leader who insisted that followers abandon their families had already deserted his own. Divorced with two children, Applewhite, the son of a preacher, had left his home amid accusations that he had affairs with boys at two different schools. An emotional crisis landed him in a psychiatric hospital, where he met a nurse, Bonnie Lu Nettles, an astrology and spiritualism buff who said she channeled



ORDERLY EXIT
Cult members found in the California mansion were all dressed androgynously and had close-cropped hair, which led first responders to initially report that all 39 were young men.

STAR SIGN
After years of waiting for a spaceship to arrive, Applewhite told followers that the appearance of Hale-Bopp in the sky in 1997 was "the marker" to act.

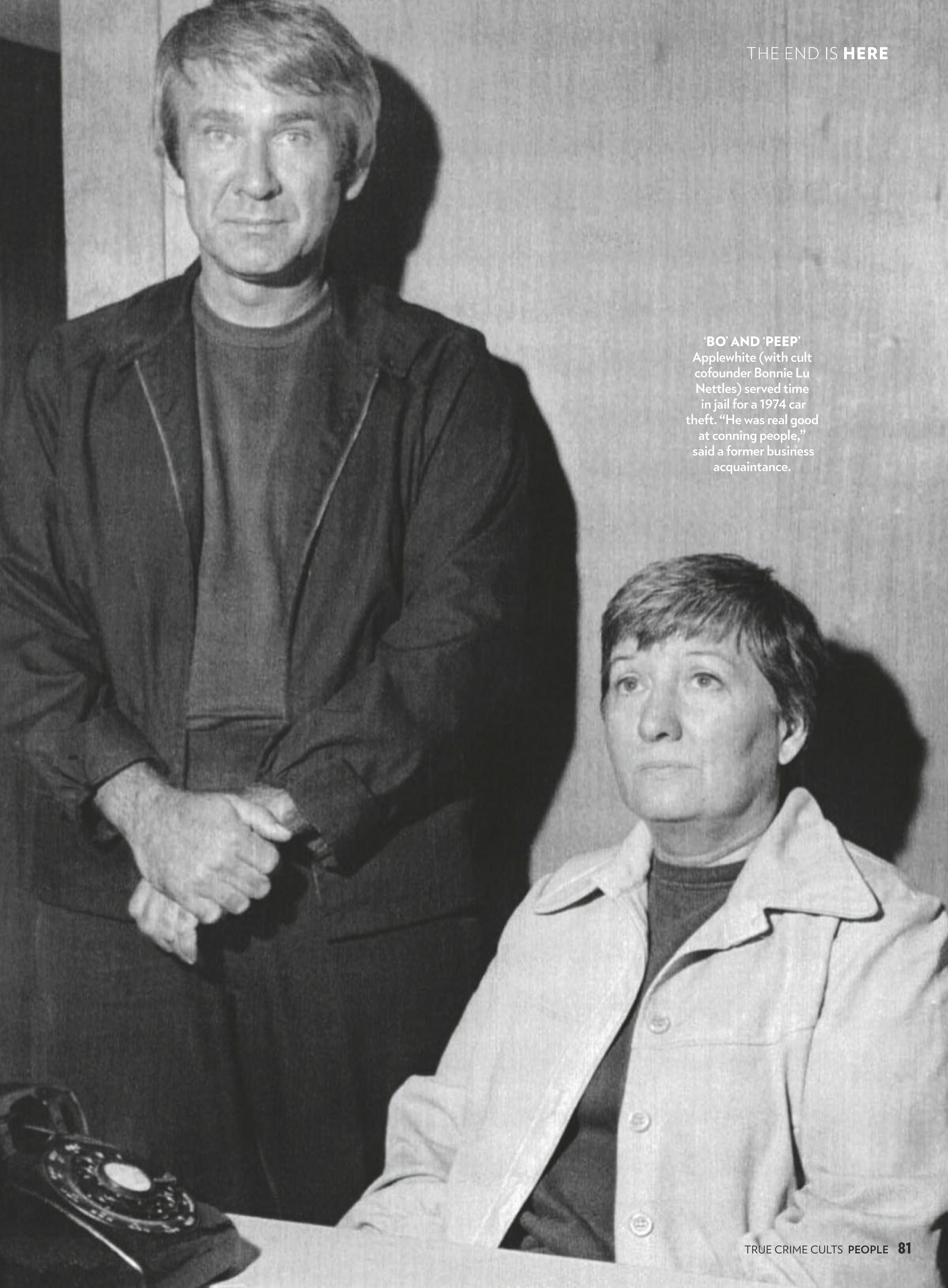

THE ONLY WAY OUT
OF THIS CORRUPT HUMAN KINGDOM

RECRUITING
A member of the cult displays a Heaven's Gate flyer on the beach in Santa Monica: "The only way out of this corrupt human kingdom."

> "SHE JUST GOT SUCKED IN AND COULDN'T GET OUT.... IT WAS LIKE A FATAL DISEASE. SHE WAS A VICTIM..."
>
> **—THE PARENTS OF SUICIDE CULT MEMBER GAIL MAEDER, 27**

the ghost of a monk named Brother Francis. Together the two cobbled together an ersatz theology based on the Bible's Book of Revelation, occult texts and sci-fi films like *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (among the dead at Rancho Santa Fe was the brother of the original *Star Trek*'s Lt. Uhura, Nichelle Nichols). Billing themselves amusingly as nursery rhyme characters Bo and Peep, the pair first made news in 1975 when CBS anchor Walter Cronkite reported that 20 local residents of Waldport, Ore., had vanished after attending a meeting with the UFO cultists. "It's a mystery," Cronkite said, "whether they've been taken on a so-called trip to eternity or simply been taken." At its height in the '70s, Applewhite's itinerant cult was thought to have hundreds of members.

As the Hale-Bopp comet swung through the sky on March 22, 1997, Applewhite and his 38 devotees followed a scripted suicide procedure at the rented Rancho Santa Fe mansion. After ingesting Dramamine and tea and toast, the cult members chased a lethal dose of phenobarbital with a shot of vodka. There was nothing pleasant about the coup de grace. A plastic bag was tied over the head of each victim. Former cult members surmised that it was the group's day-to-day operations manager Brother Logan, formerly known as John "Mickey" Craig, who may have been the last to die. Friends left behind in Colorado recalled Craig as a "totally normal guy" but one who had financial problems and had sought help from a psychic months before his disappearance. "Obviously he was searching for something," an ex-friend told *The New York Times*. But, he added, "if anyone deserves to go to heaven, [his wife] Mary Ann does."



'BO' AND 'PEEP' Applewhite (with cult cofounder Bonnie Lu Nettles) served time in jail for a 1974 car theft. "He was real good at conning people," said a former business acquaintance.

AUM SHINRIKYO

ARMAGEDDON IN TOKYO

A cult leader's plan to unleash global chaos by releasing deadly gas on the Tokyo subway left a dozen dead and thousands injured

WITH THEIR ROLLED-UP NEWSPAPERS, umbrellas and ubiquitous-in-Japan flu-season face masks, the five men looked like ordinary commuters when they boarded subway cars on five different lines of the massive Tokyo metro system at the height of the March 20, 1995, Monday morning rush hour. But the men, members of the Aum Shinrikyo (Supreme Truth) doomsday cult, carried packets containing nearly a quart of liquid sarin, a lethal nerve agent, inside their newspapers. The metal tips of their umbrellas were filed to knife points. As the crowded trains pulled into stations where accomplices waited outside in getaway cars, the men dropped their newspapers on the floor at the feet of their fellow passengers. They then used the umbrellas to stab holes in the parcels inside and exited the trains before the liquid turned into a deadly vapor capable of paralyzing the central nervous system spread through the cars.

TOMORROW'S WORLD
"I was afraid of dying. I liked their creed," said a follower of Shoko Asahara (in Russia in 1994), whose cult promised eternal life through reincarnation.

Behind them the cult members left 12 dead, among them first responders contaminated as they tried to aid victims, more than 6,000 poisoned commuters and nationwide panic. In what would become a sickening routine in coming decades, a terror alert was issued, military units were rushed to the scene to assist law enforcement, emergency meetings of the government were convened, and police beefed up security at transportation hubs and scoured the city for suspicious packages left unattended. Not yet accustomed to the sight of emergency workers in hazmat suits, *The New York Times* reported that "men in gas masks and clothes resembling space suits probed for clues."

The dragnet resulted in the arrest of 200 members of the terror cult, including Supreme Truth leader Shoko Asahara, who was found hiding in a crawl space at one of his group's compounds at the foot of Mt. Fuji. Previously thought to be the leader of a benign if eccentric sect of spiritual seekers, Asahara would eventually be charged along with a dozen of his followers for the subway attack and a long series of previously unsolved assassinations and attempted killings using botulism, anthrax and sarin. At one of the cult's chemical plants, investigators found poisons reportedly capable of killing 4.2 million people. Denying responsibility for the subway attack, the cult leader improbably claimed his own group was the actual target of a sarin-gas plot.

A former acupuncturist and yoga instructor, Asahara

GLOBAL REACH
Asahara (in India) spread his gospel worldwide; the cult flourished in Russia and had a small office in New York City.

BETRAYAL
"They promise you heaven but make you live in hell," a former Aum member said of the cult. Left: One of the sect's 36 branches, in Kamikuishiki in 1995.

CHEMICAL BANK
Asahara was arrested at his compound near Mt. Fuji (below), where cult scientists brewed poisons in a secret production facility.

DEFENSELESS
"We're just innocent, ordinary people," a victim said of the Tokyo attack. "It frightens me to think how vulnerable we are."

> "AUM SHINRIKYO SOUGHT TO CLEANSE THE WORLD OF ALL ITS DEFILEMENT BY DESTROYING IT. ONLY THEN COULD A PURE, NEW PEOPLE AND SPIRITUAL LEVEL BE ATTAINED"
>
> **—CULT EXPERT ROBERT JAY LIFTON**

preached a mishmash of Hindu, Buddhist and Christian teachings, mixed in with the racist ideology of Adolf Hitler. He claimed to have had a vision in which the Hindu deity Shiva ordered him to command "an army of the gods" to make war on infidels, among them Freemasons, Jews, the British royal family and Japan's WWII enemy the United States. America, he declared, was plotting to destroy Japan in a chemical-weapons attack. Asahara offered himself as "Christ" and "the Lamb of God," born to lead followers out of the ruins and to enlightenment.

Like other doomsday-sect leaders whom author and cult expert Robert Jay Lifton has termed "action prophets," Asahara first predicted, then attempted to ignite, the very cataclysm he prophesied. The subway attack was to be a prelude to the cultists' plan to manufacture 70 tons of sarin, which was first developed in Nazi Germany, and use helicopters to spread it over Tokyo. "That could have killed people in the hundreds of thousands, even millions," Lifton, author of *Destroying the World to Save It,* said in a 1997 interview. "That was to be their means of setting off World War III. That was their modest ambition."

Mass destruction, if not world-ending apocalypse, seemed a frighteningly achievable goal for a cult that sought to secure nuclear weapons and developed its own biochemical weapons in a bioterror factory that employed several highly trained scientists, among them a university hospital department head who gave up his career and left his family to follow Asahara.

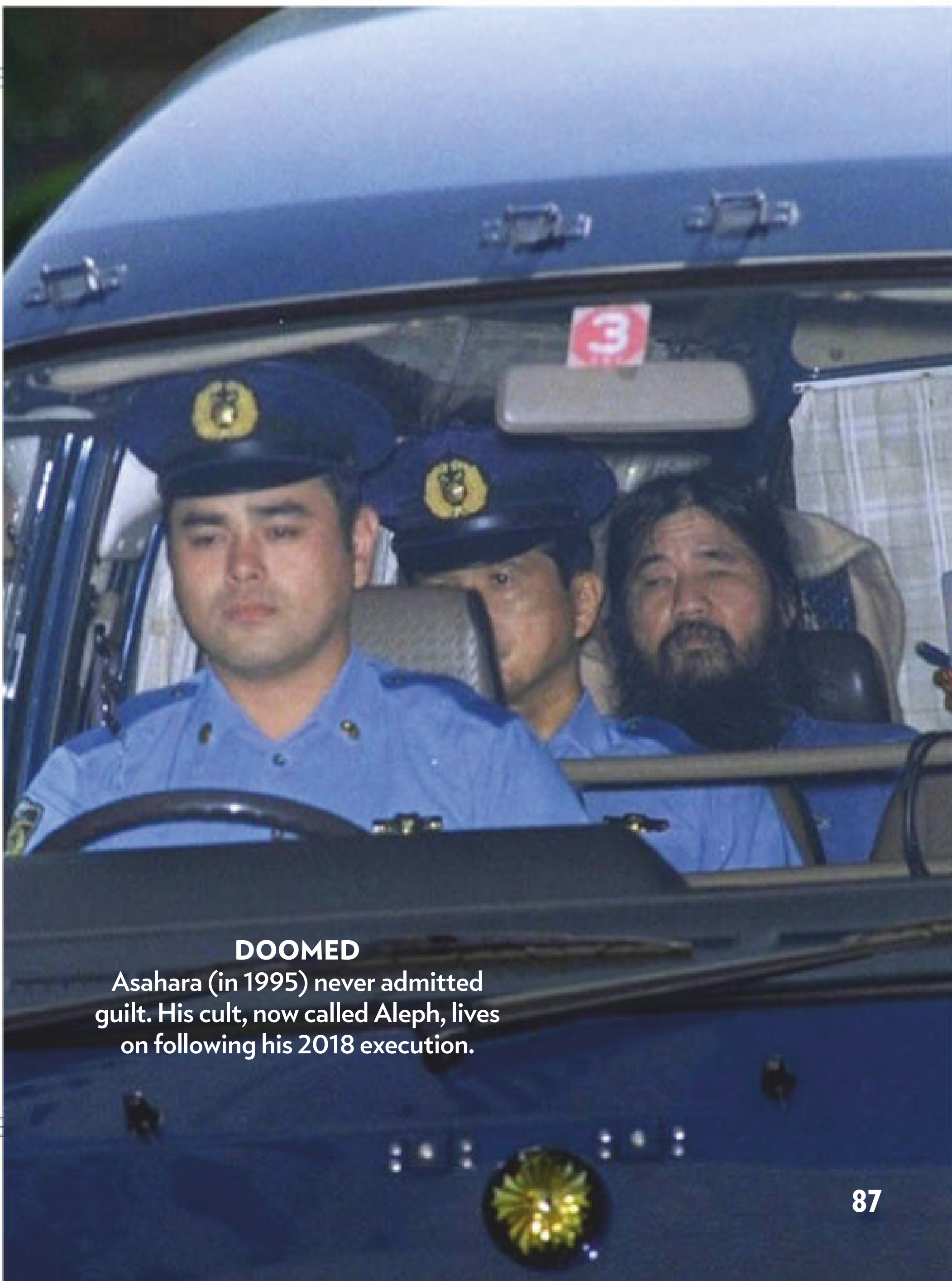
By offering enlightenment and, he alleged, superpowers of levitation, Asahara could claim more than 10,000 followers, many of them disaffected young people and some so devout they reportedly drank his bathwater. Charged with 27 murders and sentenced to death in 2004, he and 12 of his followers were hanged, after numerous appeals, earlier this year (see box, page 87). Though Supreme Truth was declared a terrorist organization in many nations, a two-decades-old ban has been lifted in Japan, and the cult has thrived in Russia, where some 30,000 members have been reported. "They do believe that [Asahara] is a messiah," a Japanese official said of a Montenegro branch of the cult. "But are they terrorists? Difficult to say."

GAS STATION
A decontamination crew cleared the Tokyo subway of traces of sarin, a deadly nerve agent.

JUSTICE CATCHES UP WITH MADNESS

MORE THAN TWO DECADES AFTER THE CRIMES, AUM'S LEADER WAS EXECUTED

It was called the trial of the century in Japan, but Shoko Asahara was little fazed, yawning and mumbling to himself during the eight-year proceedings that condemned the cult leader and 12 followers to death by hanging in 2004. In July, after Japan's supreme court rejected the last of their appeals, Asahara and the others were notified only a few hours before their executions, according to the custom there. "After 23 years the time has finally come," said the widow of one of the cult's victims. "That's all I feel."



DOOMED
Asahara (in 1995) never admitted guilt. His cult, now called Aleph, lives on following his 2018 execution.

FIRST LOOK!

PEOPLE MAGAZINE

SHERIFF'S LINE

INVESTIGATES

TUNE IN

People Magazine Investigates
Premieres on Investigation Discovery Nov. 5 at 10/9c

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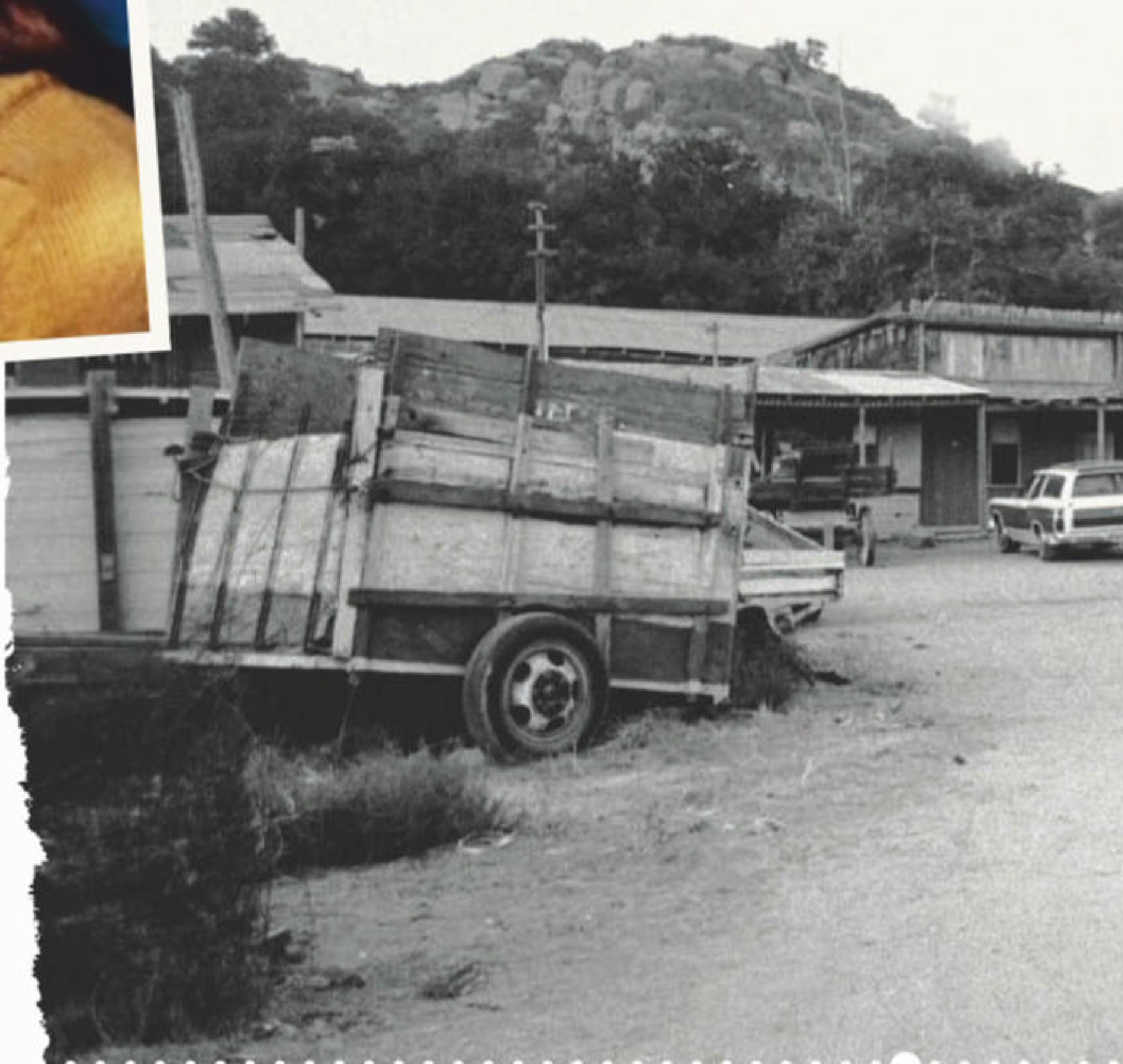


SPAHN RANCH
The savage knife murder of Canadian teen Reet Jurvetson (left) led investigators to the Manson Family's remote San Fernando Valley hideout.

MURDERED BY MANSON FAMILY?

VICTIM JANE DOE NO. 59 REGAINS HER IDENTITY NEARLY HALF A CENTURY AFTER HER MURDER

Los Angeles was a city on edge in the months following the stabbing deaths of actress Sharon Tate and six others in August 1969. And so on the afternoon of Nov. 16, with the crimes of Charles Manson and his Family still fresh in the headlines, fears ratcheted up when a birdwatcher spotted the lifeless body of a beautiful young woman tangled in dense brush off L.A.'s scenic Mulholland Drive, a few miles from the site of the Tate killings. The victim had been stabbed at least 150 times in what police said was a bloody "rage." Fueling speculation that the murder was more work of the Manson Family, a caretaker at the Spahn Ranch, the cult's hideout, told police he recognized the victim. But the lead led nowhere. Found with no ID, the victim was designated Jane Doe No. 59. In his 1974 bestseller *Helter Skelter,* prosecutor Vincent Bugliosi suggested the victim had been murdered by Manson Family members because she had witnessed another killing. Finally, in 2015, after 46 years of mystery, investigators were able to match DNA from the victim's bloody bra with her sister's. Jane Doe was identified as Reet Jurvetson, a 19-year-old Montreal free spirit whose family lost track of her shortly after she moved to L.A. to meet a man identified only as John or Jean. That mystery man is now a focus of investigators, says LAPD cold-case detective Luis Rivera. "He is the best lead we have," Rivera told *People*. "We are trying to backtrack her steps. We are trying our best."

DEADLY SEARCH: A TIMELINE

AUG. 9-10, 1969
Sharon Tate and six others are killed in a two-day spree.

SPAHN'S MOVIE RANCH
SADDLE HORSES FOR RENT
OPEN

FALL 1969
Reet Jurvetson moves from Canada to L.A.

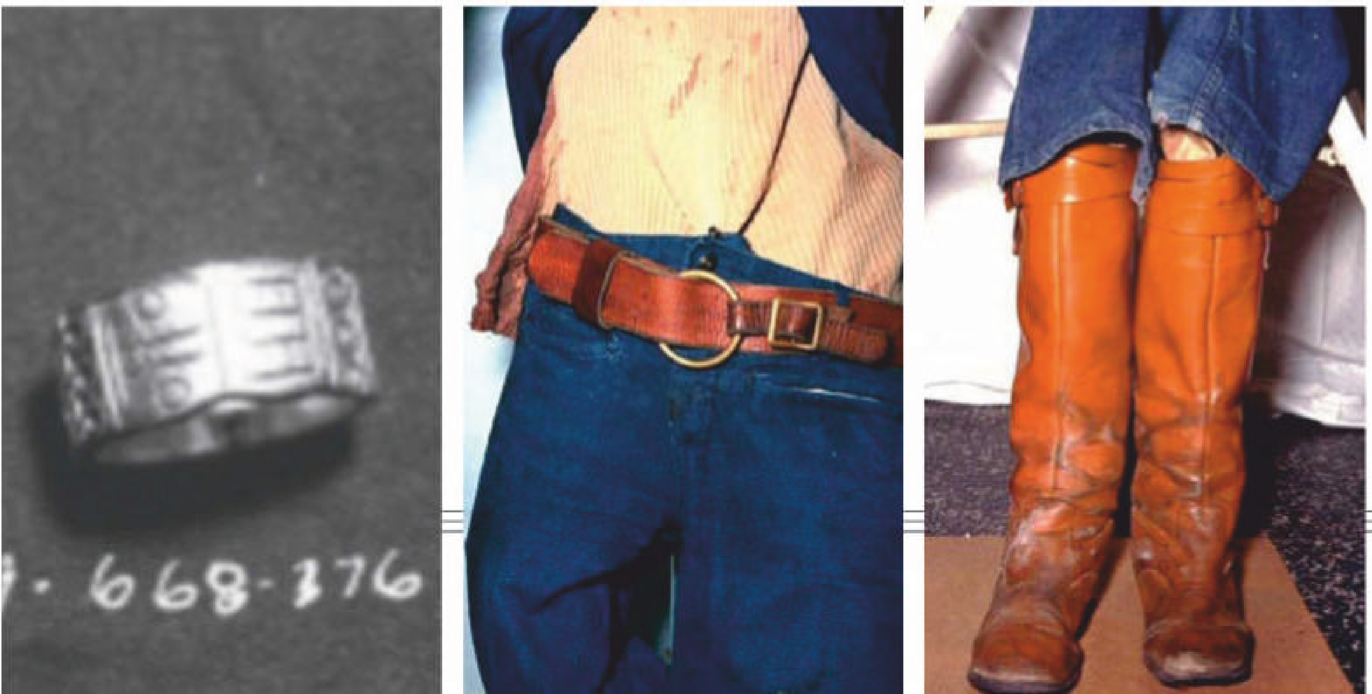
OCT. 12, 1969
Charles Manson and some Family members arrested on unrelated charges.

NOV. 16, 1969
Jane Doe No. 59 is found, fatally stabbed at least 150 times.

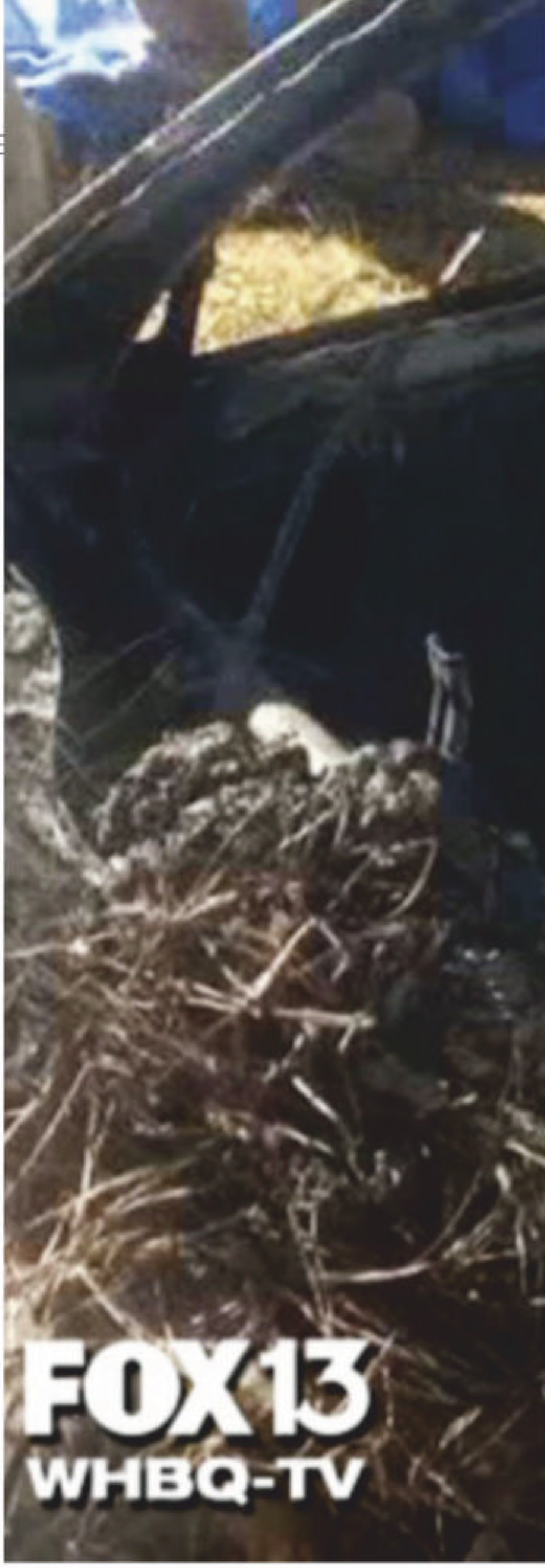
2003
The LAPD runs new tests on victim's bloody bra.

2015
DNA confirms Jane Doe No. 59 is Reet Jurvetson.

APRIL 2016
Police publicly ID Reet in hopes of finding her killer.



CLUES IN EVIDENCE
Clothing that Jurvetson was wearing had Canadian tags, but since her parents never reported her missing, police were stumped. "They thought she was just living her life somewhere," her sister Anne told *People*. The ring the victim was wearing was one that was given to her sister by their father and made from his cuff links, Anne told investigators.



JUSTICE FOR JESSICA DELAYED

NO CONVICTION IN THE CASE OF A YOUNG WOMAN BURNED ALIVE

It was a murder too savage to ever forget. Nineteen-year-old former high school cheerleader Jessica Chambers was found stumbling along a road in rural Courtland, Miss., on Dec. 6, 2014, her black Kia Rio engulfed in flames nearby and burns covering 98 percent of her body. Her death at a hospital in Memphis the next morning launched a two-year probe into who had intentionally set her car alight, causing a murder so grisly, investigators reasoned, it had to have been committed for deeply personal reasons.

Chambers herself had left a clue: The dying woman muttered the name Eric or Derek to first responders. Police fanned out, questioning men named Eric and many others in the working-class community, including some associated with gangs and drug dealing. Though the petite, blonde Chambers graduated from high school with A's and B's, according to her friend Leslie Hall, and held down a job at a department store in nearby Batesville, Miss., she ran with a rough crowd. Her father, Ben Chambers, a mechanic for the sheriff's office, worried for Jessica's safety. "The last six weeks before she died she told me 10 or 15 times, 'Everybody thinks I'm snitching because you work for the police,'" he told *People*.

More than a year after the murder authorities arrested Quinton Tellis, then 27, a recent acquaintance of the victim's. Using phone records, a prosecutor claimed at Tellis's trial in 2016 that the defendant, who pleaded not guilty, was with Chambers shortly before she was burned alive (see timeline). As motive, the prosecutor argued that Tellis had sex with Chambers and then tried to suffocate her; thinking she was dead, he allegedly doused her and her car with accelerant and set them on fire.

But his name was not Eric—a point Tellis's defense used to cast doubt on his guilt. In the end jurors could not agree on whether he was the murderer, and the case ended in mistrial. Tellis was tried again in 2018, with another hung jury. For Chambers's father the painful uncertainty surrounding his daughter's death remains. "It breaks my heart," Ben told *People*, "how some evil person can destroy your life. The unknown is what is killing me."

HOW SHE SPENT HER LAST DAY: TIMELINE

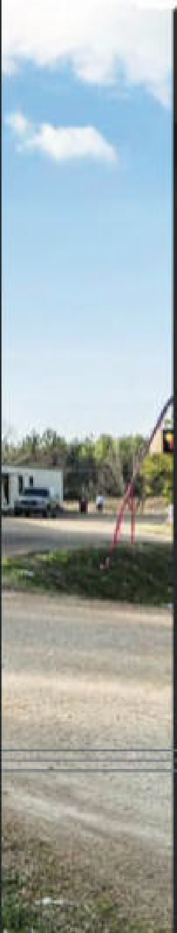
4:59 P.M.
AT HOME
Jessica is napping in a chair in her living room in Courtland, Miss., after watching *CSI* with her mother.

5 P.M.
FATEFUL CALL
Jessica talks on her cell phone (to someone at a number police won't disclose), then leaves in her car.

5:15 P.M. FIRST STOP
At M&M minimart Jessica buys $14 in gas and gets a call, then she heads south on Highway 51.

NO RESOLUTION
Chambers's father, Ben (with Jessica's mother, Lisa), kept her old room exactly as it was at the time of her death. "I still text her phone," Lisa told *People* in 2016.

RAGING FIRE
The black Kia Rio driven by Chambers (inset, in 2012) was bleached white by the blaze, which Ben Chambers says may have burned for a half hour before the 911 call.



5:45 P.M.
LAST STOP?
After calling her mom to say she'll be home "in a little bit," Jessica goes to an undisclosed Courtland home.

6 P.M.
LEAVES CITY
Jessica spends 10 to 15 minutes in the area of Highway 6's first stoplight, headed into Batesville.

6:30 P.M.
MYSTERY HOUR
Police say they know who Jessica was with from 6:30 to 7:32 p.m., when she arrived on Herron Road. (A suspect was indicted 14 months later.)

8:09 P.M. 911 CALL
A motorist calls to report a burning car a mile away from the M&M minimart. Airlifted to Memphis, Chambers dies at 2:37 a.m.

FOX13
WHBQ-TV

GONE IN 90 SECONDS— ALIVE 19 YEARS LATER?

YEARS AFTER MIKELLE BIGGS VANISHED WITHOUT A TRACE, HOPE FLARES IN A HEARTBREAKING MYSTERY

On a chilly afternoon in January 1999, Mikelle Biggs and her little sister Kimber were at home in Mesa, Ariz., when they thought they heard a familiar sound of summer—the jingling bells of an ice-cream truck. But when the truck didn't appear as they waited near the corner in the cold, Kimber retreated inside. Her mother immediately sent her back outside to get her sister. But Mikelle, an 11-year-old sixth-grade A student, was nowhere to be seen. Her bicycle lay in the street nearby, her quarters for ice cream scattered on the pavement. Police calculated that no more than 90 seconds had passed since Kimber had last seen her sister alive. "I still wonder, 'What if I had not left?'" Kimber, now 28, told Arizona's *East Valley Tribune*. In the aftermath of Mikelle's disappearance, police sifted through more than 10,000 tips before the case stalled. Resigned, Mikelle's parents held a funeral for her in 2004. The case remained in the deep freeze until last March, when a man in Neenah, Wisc., gave police a $1 bill that he said he had found in a collection jar for Girl Scout cookies. Scrawled in ink along the bill's border was a message: "My name is Mikel [sic] Biggs kidnapped From Mesa AZ I'm Alive." Initial hopes that it was written by Mikelle and would prove a pivotal break in the case quickly gave way to reality. Because of the misspelling of Mikelle's first name, Kimber told *The Arizona Republic,* "I don't believe she would have written it. There's always a bit of hope, but I think right now we just want it to lead to someone who knows something."

NOT FORGOTTEN
Kimber Biggs (in Arizona) and Mesa Police Detective Steve Barry (below, with the bicycle Mikelle left behind).

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MANSON'S GIRLS: WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

THEY ALL RENOUNCED THE FORMER 'MESSIAH' WHO LED THEM TO MADNESS

1. Susan Atkins bragged of killing Sharon Tate and her unborn baby, then wrote the word 'Pig' in blood. In prison she claimed to be a Born Again Christian; she died of brain cancer at 61. 2. Patricia Krenwinkel, 70, killed coffee heiress Abigail Folger and helped murder Leno and Rosemary LaBianca; she is California's longest-serving female inmate. 3. Leslie Van Houten, 69, was a 19-year-old former homecoming queen when she butchered Rosemary LaBianca; California governor Jerry Brown blocked her parole.

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